

WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: 3/28/2023

Name: Michele Howell

Are you representing: Yourself Organization

Organization (If Applicable): Independence of Portage County, Inc.

Position/Title: _____

Address: 734 East Highland Ave.

City: Ravenna State: OH Zip: 44266

Best Contact Telephone: 330-389-0048 Email: milika667@yahoo.com

Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes No

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): HB 33

Specific Issue: Department of Developmental Disabilities and Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities Budget

Are you testifying as a: Proponent Opponent Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes No

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? Written testimony only

Please provide a brief statement on your position: I support the budget initiatives outlined by DODD and OOD and encourage the sub-committee to include additional investments for these important services.

Please be advised that this form and any materials (written or otherwise) submitted or presented to this committee are records that may be requested by the public and may be published online.



INDEPENDENCE

OF PORTAGE COUNTY

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Testimony on SFY 24/25 Operating Budget House Finance Committee

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeny, and esteemed committee members,

I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Michele Howell and I am a Direct Support Professional of Independence, Inc., and we are located in Portage, Summit and Stark counties. We are an organization that provides intermediate care facilities for individuals with intellectual disabilities and residential, day and employment services through the home and community-based waiver program administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). Our team of 150 employees are proud to provide essential services to 80 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

I am very supportive of the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Hauck for DODD and the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Miller for Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD). The changing labor landscape and accompanying shortage of workers, including direct support professionals (DSP), threatens our ability to provide the critical supports on which the people we serve and their families rely. The budget proposed in HB 33 is a good foundation to help our system combat these many changes.

The stability of the direct support workforce has been a long-standing issue across disability service systems. Our industry continues to be plagued with high turnover at a time when demand for additional direct support professionals to support persons with disability is rapidly growing. Action is necessary if we want to ensure that supports provided are person-centered, increase inclusion, and lead to valued lives for people with disabilities. However, we have yet to be able to ensure sufficient funding to support these initiatives and our legislators are the only ones that can assist in this action of securing our industry's most valuable asset – Direct Support Professionals.

The Governor's proposed budget initiatives, guided by the leadership of Director Hauck and Miller, is a great foundation to reinforce and rebuild the services provided by Independence, Inc. With these budget initiatives, Ohioans with disabilities will continue to receive the vital employment services organizations like mine provide. **We encourage this committee to approve the Governor's budget proposal for DODD and ODD and to invest additional dollars through budget amendment HC0656 into these vital services to raise direct support professional wages to at least an average of \$20.64.**

With your leadership, together we can ensure these services are available to the Ohioans that so greatly need them! **Thank you again, for the opportunity and privilege to bring my concerns before you today.**

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