



CREATING PATHWAYS FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES TO ENGAGE IN THE COMMUNITY, ACHIEVE GREATER INDEPENDENCE, AND ATTAIN EMPLOYMENT.

March 28, 2023

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

I am Susie Barragate, President and CEO of Vocational Guidance Services (VGS.) I am pleased to provide this testimony today and thank you for the opportunity to do so. VGS is located in Cleveland and serves individuals with disabilities throughout the state of Ohio, predominately in Cuyahoga and Lorain counties. VGS provides programming and services to a wide range of individuals with developmental, physical, and cognitive disabilities of varying severity. VGS provides vocational rehabilitation services, job training, and employment through Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD.) VGS' team of 300 employees are proud to provide essential services to more than 700 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

I am very supportive of the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Hauck of the for the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) and the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Miller for OOD. The changing labor landscape and accompanying shortage of workers, including direct support professionals (DSP), threatens our ability to provide critical support and programming to Ohioans with disabilities. DSPs are leaving the field at an alarming rate due to pay rates and leaving organizations like ours short staffed. The budget proposed in HB 33 is a starting point to address the glaring inadequacies in pay for DSPs.

VGS is a 133-year old organization that relies on skilled, compassionate, and innovative DSPs that work hands-on with the individuals we serve. They are the heart and the hands of our work and deserve to be paid a living wage. DSPs provide job training and vocational rehabilitation, supervise paid work opportunities, and assist with the job seeking process for individuals with disabilities. They also provide opportunities for individuals to engage in their communities, build social skills, and gain independence. The breadth of their impact is immeasurable – it is essential that they state of Ohio provide them with wages that reflect their value to individuals with disabilities and our communities at large. When DSPs leave the field due to the lack of adequate pay, individuals with disabilities lose essential services – from day services to competitive integrated employment – and the impacts, if the issue is not addressed, will be catastrophic.

The Governor's proposed budget initiatives, guided by the leadership of Director Hauck and Director Miller, is a solid foundation to reinforce and rebuild the staff VGS and similar organizations need to survive and thrive. With these budget initiatives, Ohioans with disabilities will continue to receive the vital vocational rehabilitation and employment services they need to gain independence and earn a paycheck. **We encourage this committee to approve the Governor's budget proposal for OOD 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.**

Sincerely,

Susie Barragate  
President and CEO  
Vocational Guidance Services

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