



**Testimony on SFY 24/25 Operating Budget
House Finance Health and Human Services Sub-Committee**

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President & CEO



Chairwoman Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and esteemed committee members,

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

My name is Beth Lucas, and I am the President and CEO of United Cerebral Palsy of Greater Cleveland (UCP), and we are located in Cuyahoga County, serving two additional Counties (Medina & Lorain). We are an organization that provides Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services funded by Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) for 300 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Our entire organization employs 172 team members. Approximately 17 of these employees provide VR services through OOD.

I am very supportive of 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 job coaches, threatens our ability to achieve our mission to empower children and adults with disabilities to advance their independence, productivity, and inclusion in the community. These budget initiatives, and the leadership of Director Miller, will support us to recruit and retain the staff needed to continue to provide vital employment services to Ohioans with Developmental Disabilities. Attached is an example of the great work UCP's employment staff accomplished this year through services and funding from OOD.

UCP is proud to be a premier, valued provider of a myriad of VR services including Job Development, On-the-Job-Supports, Community Based Assessments, Work Adjustments, Career Exploration, as well as a provider of Summer Youth Work Experiences throughout Northeast Ohio that consistently outperform state metrics. Additionally, UCP partners with OOD, school districts, and local businesses at four area Project SEARCH sites where we provide Job Readiness Training to high school students with disabilities during their final year of high school.

In 2022, the number of competitive job placements decreased by 30% (31 less placements) and pauses were placed on accepting new job coaching referrals throughout the year. In addition to the inability to recruit qualified job coaches/skills trainers, we had approximately 40% turnover in the last six months of 2022 largely due to wages. In serving transition-age youth, certain vital pre-vocational programming was put on hold due to rate levels, leading to 39 less students served. UCP invested valuable resources and connections to develop new and exciting Summer Youth sites and increased the capacity to serve 72 participants while receiving less than half the referrals to make them viable.

We encourage the General Assembly to approve the Governor's budget proposal for OOD. 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 and if I can ever be of any help in this process, please let me know.**

Beth A. Lucas
blucas@ucpcleveland.org
10011 Euclid Ave, Cleveland, OH 44106
216-453-4942

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Jesse began his journey to employment with UCP Transition Services funded by OOD as part of the 2012 and 2013 Summer Youth Work Experience. This program allows transition-age high school students with disabilities the opportunity to explore different careers to find what they are interested in and to build job-related skills to help them on whatever path they choose. After Jesse graduated from high school in 2014, he began in the UCP Job Training Services program where he worked on packaging, sorting, shredding documents and even tried some janitorial work.



In January of 2016, Jesse began working at a UCP Supported Employment Site at Oatey SCS where Jesses worked with peers to complete light industrial tasks. Jesse was incredibly successful until he laid off due pandemic related staffing in March of 2020. Jesse returned from layoff in July of 2020 where he and the UCP team recognized he had outgrown his current work situation.

He completed a Community Based Assessment through OOD at Joann Fabrics. It was here discovered that Jesse could thrive outside his comfort zone of light industrial work. Jesse was authorized for Job Development and began his job search with a Job Developer at UCP. A position at Euclid Heat Treating was identified. UCP worked in concert with the Employment Collaborative of Cuyahoga County to support Jesse in the steps of obtaining an interview. Jesse applied and was hired as a materials handler. OOD authorized Jesse to receive On-The-Job-Supports from UCP as he learned the responsibilities of his job. Jesse's job coach, Charlie Freed, states, "He gets along very well with co-workers and is a big asset to the team. He has a willingness to learn new tasks and does so quickly. Jesse is always smiling and happy when he comes to work." Jesse just successfully completed his first 90 days with positive feedback from his employer. His path to employment was possible due to supports from OOD and community partners.

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10011 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44106 • 216-791-8363 • www.ucpcleveland.org