



OHIO COUNCIL
FOR HOME CARE & HOSPICE

HB 33 Interested Party Testimony
Lisa Von Lehmden Zidek, OCHCH Board Chair
House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
Chair Sara P. Carruthers
March 8, 2023

Chair Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, thank you for allowing me to testify today on HB 33, Ohio's biennial operating budget. My name is Lisa Von Lehmden Zidek, and I am the current Board Chair of the Ohio Council for Home Care and Hospice. The Ohio Council for Home Care and Hospice (OCHCH) is a non-profit association that represents the interests of health care at home providers in Ohio. OCHCH advocates for ethical, compassionate, and quality home and community-based care, as well as for the individuals and families our members serve. As the voice of health care at home, our council strives to provide value, resources, and partnership for those who provide care for our most vulnerable citizens.

Our request is simple. We are desperately seeking needed rate increases for Home and Community Based Services (HCBS). We are ambassadors of care in communities across the state of Ohio, but must share with you the struggles our providers are facing without appropriate support. However, I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the DeWine Administration and Department of Medicaid for recognizing the importance of HCBS as they shared their intent to increase rates when testifying before the House Finance Committee last month. Based on testimony and other documentation shared from HHS agencies, HCBS rate increases are planned should the bill pass as proposed for both State Plan and waiver services. We applaud the Administration for hearing our concerns and are grateful for the proposed starting point for this discussion. However, we submit to the Subcommittee that due to years of neglect, these increases are still behind and as such are seeking to further expand the proposed rates increases to more accurately reflect market rates for services.

Since we last had the opportunity to testify on HCBS rates during the HB 110 FY22-23 budget, we have seen dramatic changes impacting our agencies. We accurately predicted home care agencies would face financial hardships and struggle providing care to Medicaid patients due to uncompetitive and dramatically low reimbursement rates. Our industry and association members face large waiting lists for services and workforce shortages. Ultimately, the worst-case scenario is patients losing all access to home care services as agencies simply cease providing fiscally unsustainable care for Medicaid patients. Unfortunately, we have seen agencies already taking this route with more agencies considering this option. This forces Ohioans to either go without care or forced into more expensive care settings.

Recent numbers show over 5,000 patients on wait lists throughout Ohio for PASSPORT, State and Waiver Services from home health agencies through Area Agencies on Aging. In August 2022, 1,693 patients were turned away by a single agency serving patients throughout the state. *These numbers are staggering.* We received a copy of a letter from an agency owner-operator in northeast Ohio to Ohio Medicaid notifying them they would be closing her doors effective end of October, and as a result displacing their entire census of Medicaid patients leaving them without access to care. What's more concerning are the people behind these numbers. Businesses are shutting down business lines, and in some cases their entire business because they have lost too much money waiting for the state of Ohio to come to the rescue with rate increases.

As you know, home and community-based services are often the least expensive, and most desired level of care by patients. Additionally, the pandemic during 2020-21 placed a large spotlight on the importance of infection control, and escalated the desire for many families to seek home care. Last budget cycle, through a difficult budget the Ohio Department of Medicaid provided for the first time in nearly 20 years a 6.1% increase for home care services which was desperately needed and appreciated. However, inflation over the last 20 years has been more than 70% and the increase inadequate for the necessary level of care for our sickest and most fragile.

Having the ability to identify patients that have not yet become costly through the health care system is another way in which homecare makes a difference. In addition, we can help stabilize a patient and place them in control of their health before multiple trips to the ED, hospitalizations, and skilled nursing stays become a habit in lifestyle. Oftentimes our job in home and community-based services is to take someone out of a post-acute setting with a goal to stabilize, rehabilitate, and ensure access to all needed community-based services. As ambassadors of care in the home, we take the responsibility of creating and ensuring patient safety seriously and have established relationships with skilled nursing facilities, assisted-living facilities, and long-term care facilities to ensure a patient is receiving an appropriate level of care. We are aware of a patient's ability to thrive in certain environments, and if the home is not one of them, it is our responsibility to help them find a more suitable scenario, such as a long-term care setting. However, continued disparities on Medicaid rates for HCBS exacerbates the inability to provide appropriate access for care in home-based settings, and creates a revolving door for patients in and out of the hospital and skilled nursing facilities causing further strain to our health care system and budget.

We cannot continue to provide services for nursing visits at current rates. With our panel today, you will see more details on our proposed rate request provided by Kimberly King, COO of Home Care Network; market analysis and formulas surrounding the rate request provided by Katie Gallenstein, Market Leader for Help at Home; an excerpt from veteran, owner and RN, Gregory Davis of Patriot at Home discussing the difficult obstacles and operational decisions his organization is forced to make; Brent Tow, President and CEO of Community Health Professionals; and, Joe Russell, Executive Director of Ohio Council for Home Care & Hospice.

Chair Carruthers and members of the Subcommittee thank you once again for allowing me to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at the appropriate time.