



Chairwoman Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and esteemed committee members, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Bethany Toledo, I am the executive director of the Ohio Alliance of Direct Support Professionals (OADSP). I began working in the Intellectual/Developmental Disability field as a Direct Support Professional in 1999. Over the years, I developed a strong passion for supporting and arming DSPs with the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in supporting people with disabilities. My experience has led me to provide support and consultation to stakeholder groups outside of Ohio to replicate successful and sustainable models of credentialing and DSP support systems.

OADSP is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization whose mission is to Educate, Elevate, and Empower Direct Support Professionals and Frontline Supervisors through professional development opportunities, recognition, and advocacy efforts. Our vision is a highly valued and skilled human service workforce that encourages and supports people with disabilities to lead self-directed lives. OADSP is not a membership-based organization; that is to say, everything we do and stand for is to further our mission and vision, regardless of where a DSP works. Today, you have heard about DSPs that work in various environments; including Intermediate Care Facilities (ICFs), state run developmental centers, day programs, and residential settings. OADSP's programs, services, and support are for all of them.

As I prepared my testimony for today, I went back into my files and pulled out testimonies that I gave in 2017 and 2019. I could stand here and read word-for-word what I wrote back then, and it all still rings true today. However, that would discount the effects of the pandemic and today's emergent circumstances we find ourselves in. It is for that reason that my testimony will focus on why, while historic and groundbreaking, the current budget initiatives proposed for DODD are not enough to sustain, let alone meet the growing need for support of people with developmental disabilities in Ohio.

Over the past several months, OADSP has been engaged in gathering data from current DSPs about their experiences to gain insight into how they view their work and what they need to continue doing it. While wages and benefits are the biggest factors, the two major, albeit competing, themes that have risen to the top are the absolute pride DSPs have in their work and their ability to be of service to others, and the sacrifices they make in order to do the work. These sacrifices include relying on public assistance to make ends meet, working extreme amounts of overtime or working two and three jobs. DSPs are hanging on by threads, and those threads are breaking daily. As you heard from Pam earlier, she owns her own business in addition to working as a full-time DSP and she still struggles to put gas in her car and afford necessities. As you will hear from Joshua in a few moments, even the most passionate and dedicated DSPs can be forced to leave the field in order to survive.



Low visibility and low pay make it difficult to recruit new DSPs. I see this first-hand as OADSP works to provide secondary and adult education options through our program, DSP-U. During this program, students have the ability to earn industry credentials from OADSP that are recognized by the Ohio Department of Education. We also partner with adult education entities and county boards of developmental disabilities to provide training and education to adult non-incumbent workers. While it is exhilarating to educate adults and soon to be adults about career options to become a Direct Support Professional, it is hard to get administrators to invest in a program that will have their students making less than a living wage. On a personal level, it is even harder looking these potential DSPs in the eye and know that they will struggle to support themselves and their family on the wages of a DSP.

The responsibilities of Direct Support Professionals are immense, and unique to each person supported. I have provided as a supplement to my testimony. It is a crosswalk developed by the National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) that compares the competencies required for a DSP and other roles that DSPs often get compared to; including State Tested Nurse's Aides (STNAs), Home Health Aides (HHAs), Certified Nurse Assistants (CNAs), and Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs). This document is the result of a national advocacy effort to establish a national SOC for DSPs; however, today I am using it to give you some context when weighing our system's plea for additional funding. The role of a DSP is unlike any other health-care related role, as it is not limited to healthcare and requires a broad scope of practice.

As a field, we have come so far with supporting people with disabilities through empowering choice and providing opportunities for people to live their lives on their own terms. However, the weight of putting this philosophy into practice on a daily basis falls squarely on the shoulders of Direct Support Professionals. Our system was built on their backs, and we owe it to them to do the heavy lifting to raise their wages.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written testimony, I will gladly answer any follow-up questions you may have. Please see my contact information below.

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Direct Support Professionals need a ...

Standard Occupational Classification

The National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) is leading a nationwide effort to establish a Direct Support Professional (DSP) Standard Occupational Classification (SOC).

WHAT IS A DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL?

Direct support professionals (DSPs) assist people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities in realizing their full potential and becoming valued and participating members of their communities. Their work is complex and goes well beyond caregiving, requiring skills including independent problem solving, decision making, behavioral assessment and prevention, medication administration, health and allied health treatment, teaching new skills, crisis prevention and intervention and more.

POLICY CHALLENGE: LACK OF SOC RECOGNITION FOR THE DSP PROFESSION

Currently, DSPs are inaccurately classified in labor reports under other positions, such as a state tested nursing assistant (STNA), home health aide (HHA) or personal care assistant (PCA). The chart below compares the required competencies of a DSP to other direct care jobs, as well as licensed practical nurse (LPN), demonstrating the differences of the depth and breadth for a DSP's work. We are in the midst of an acute shortage of DSPs. The standard process for considering new SOCs is every 8-10 years, with the next proposed revision scheduled for 2028. We do not have time to wait and are therefore seeking legislation to address the issue.

NADSP Competencies	DSP	STNA	HHA	PCA	LPN
Participant Empowerment	X				
Community and Service Networking	X				
Advocacy	X				
Vocational, Educational and Career Support	X				
Organizational Participation	X				
Building and Maintaining Friendships/Relationships	X				
Provide Person-Centered Support	X				
Facilitation of Services	X			X	
Crisis Prevention and Intervention	X			X	
Education, Training and Self-Development	X	X			X
Community Living Skills and Supports	X	X	X		
Assessment	X	X		X	X
Communication	X	X	X	X	X
Documentation	X	X	X	X	X
Supporting Health and Wellness	X	X	X	X	X

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT

Please cosponsor and support **S.1437 - Recognizing the Role of Direct Support Professionals Act in the Senate** and **HR. 4779 Recognizing the Role of Direct Support Professionals Act in the House**.

