



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

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 Jessica Toivonen and I am the Executive Director of Blossom Hill, Inc., and we are located in Westlake, North Royalton, and Parma, all in Cuyahoga County. We are an Intermediate Care Facility (ICF) that provides residential services, as well as supported living and respite services through home and community-based waiver programs administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). Our team of about 100 employees are proud to provide essential services to nearly 80 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

I am very supportive of the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Hauck for DODD. The changing labor landscape and accompanying shortage of workers, including direct support professionals (DSP), threatens our ability to provide the critical services that are vital to Ohio individuals and families. Our staffing shortage is unique because it is not just about products or services. **Our staff keep people alive.** The dire impact of proper reimbursement cannot be understated.

In our 55-year history, we have depended on our small and mighty team of dedicated staff members who are passionate about the services that we offer. However, currently in 2023, we are down 15 staff members from this time last year – or **840 open hours per week**, which is significant. **Hiring and retaining Direct Support Professionals continues to be our biggest challenge** as we are only able to offer \$14/hour for a Direct Support Professional while big box stores like Target and Amazon pay \$15+/hour. Although the current reimbursement rate has increased by an average of 2%, it is not enough to keep up with the cost of inflation, which is 6.5%. We serve individuals in our residential facilities who require high levels of medical care, including 24-hour nursing and direct care. To keep our individuals safe and provide our standard excellence level of care for another 55 years, we will be forced to make very hard decisions about the number of individuals we will be able to serve.

The Governor's proposed budget initiatives, guided by the leadership of Director Hauck, is a great foundation to reinforce and rebuild the services provided by Blossom Hill, Inc. **We encourage this subcommittee to approve the Governor's budget proposal for DODD and to invest additional dollars into these vital services to raise direct support professional wages to at least an average of \$20.64. This investment will help us recruit and retain the workforce needed to continue to provide our quality services.**

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.**

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