

**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 Lisa Reed and I am the Executive Director of RHDD. Our Corporate site is located in Coshocton, Ohio and we provide services to people who have a developmental disability in eight counties throughout Southeastern, Ohio; Athens, Coshocton, Holmes, Guernsey, Meigs, Morgan, Muskingum and Washington. RHDD provided residential supports for people who have a disability as well as adult day services, non-medical transportation, waiver nursing, home modifications, adaptive equipment and much more. All of what we do is funded for through the home and community based waiver program which is administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). Our team of 211 employees are proud to provide essential services to 188 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 supports on which the people we serve and their families rely.

As a non-profit agency, we don't expect to make a profit but we do need to have enough revenue to provide a competitive wage to staff who perform these life-supporting services to the most vulnerable people in our communities. The average wage at RHDD for performing these critical services is \$13.22 an hour. That is well below the level of poverty for a single parent with two children. Our staff are trained to perform highly skilled services for people with intense and complex needs for a wage that is quite frankly, embarrassing to me. And we have struggled and sacrificed to raise the wage to that level. The fact that wages are so low is only compounded by the workforce crisis that every other industry is struggling with. What makes our situation unique is that, as a service only paid for by Medicaid, we can't negotiate for a higher reimbursement rate that would allow us to pay our staff higher wages. We can't raise the cost of our product in order to increase revenue. We can only accept the rate that is approved in regulation, and the people who suffer as a result are the people we serve.

In the thirty-one years that I have been with RHDD, I have never experienced such a desperate time for people who have a disability. Many of the people we serve rely entirely on another human being to tend to their every need; taking a shower, getting dressed, preparing medications, having a meal and getting to work. These are all things our staff do to make it possible for someone with a disability to lead productive and meaningful lives.

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 RHDD. 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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