

Maria A. Matzik
House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
Interested Party Testimony, HB 33

March 15, 2023

Chairperson Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 33.

My name is Maria Matzik, and I am the host of the Breaking Silences Advocacy Committee. I am also a consumer of the Ohio Home Care Waiver program through the MyCare Ohio program. I have Spinal Muscular Atrophy Type II. I use the assistance of a ventilator and I have a tracheostomy. I use a reclining motorized wheelchair for mobility.

We are here today to advocate not only for ourselves but for thousands of people with disabilities who will be forced into institutions and nursing homes because we will not have direct care staff to help us get out of bed, take care of our hygiene needs, and help us get started with our day. For individuals who rely on home health services, it is a terrifying time. In light of the fact that there is a dire need and demand for home and community-based caregivers in Ohio, and nationally, this issue is still not being addressed by the state or federal government.

Thousands of Ohioans with Disabilities are currently in crisis because they cannot find, hire, and keep in-home direct care workers to assist with daily living needs and/or skilled nursing tasks that are necessary to stay in their homes and not be forced into institutions. This crisis impacts people who receive Home and Community Based Services through waivers from the Ohio Department of Medicaid, Ohio Department of Aging, and the Department of Developmental Disabilities. It is important to note that home care workers include both skilled workers who offer nursing care and the direct care workers and personal care aides who help with activities of daily living.

Home care providers are a lifeline to those of us who rely on their services. Home care providers are dedicated to assisting individuals with quality care. In addition, they offer individuals the opportunity to have independence, control over their lives and the freedom to live their lives in the community and environment that they choose.

Without an immediate action plan to resolve the caregiver crisis in Ohio, we will lose more providers. The loss in coverage would mean consumers going into nursing homes or other long term care facilities. Going into any facility or institution, would bring loss to each of us. Loss of dignity, loss of voice, and the loss of ability to make our own choices, losing our jobs, homes, pets, independence. For some, a forced incarceration would mean a death sentence.

For many years, because of the nursing shortage, I have not been able to find enough nursing coverage. That means that when I get up in my wheelchair on Friday morning I do not go back to bed again until Sunday night. That means that I can only get washed, but not take a complete bath. I stay in the same clothes and do not have tracheostomy care to clean my trach. I remain on my left side because I cannot roll in my wheelchair. That means that if I need to go to work on the weekend I still go. That means that I get little to no sleep. Ask yourself, "Can I do this"? Most of you will answer "no".

I have had the choice – either go through what I have just described or go to bed on Friday night and still not be able to do several things mentioned above, like trach care because it takes two people to perform that task, not be able to go anywhere, do anything and get depressed because I am not taking part in life. For me, this is a choice that I am willing to make because it is a "choice".

To attend today's hearing, and to take part in the legislative process, I had to stay in my wheelchair last night. My cares take 4 to 5 hours to complete. I do not have caregivers who can come in at 4 AM and get me ready to leave for what could be a two-hour drive before testifying. My caregivers have other jobs, family responsibilities and health conditions. Some are caring for their aging parents, or other individuals with disabilities, and are only continuing to work for me because I cannot find additional caregivers. Some are working other jobs to supplement their income and maintain benefits because Ohio's Medicaid program does not reimburse providers a living wage and offers no benefits or opportunity for financial advancements in this profession.

Home care providers have been the unseen warriors before, but even more apparent, during the COVID pandemic. Their dedication has not been valued and their work has been underpaid. The general public, and our policy makers, have not recognized home care providers as first responders or as essential workers.

Home care providers are seldom offered health care benefits, insurance, and are not compensated for any leave of absences (PTO). Many providers are on Medicaid themselves due to their low pay which is near poverty level of income.

It is time that Ohio recognizes our in-home Direct Care Workforce as the professionals that they are and compensate them appropriately for the vital work that they do. Our society places more value on athletes, lawyers, and politicians. This profession continues to be undervalued and unrecognized for the life sustaining work that they do. This is the profession that will care for your parents, your children and even you some day. Shouldn't we invest in the future of in-home caregivers for the future of all Ohioans?

I was asked by a Senator recently, "If we raise wages for the Direct Care Workforce, what should we cut?" My response was that you should not cut anything. By investing in this profession, you are investing in a sustainable future for all individuals who rely on skilled and community living services. You are creating a future for your family and ours where we have freedom of choice in the community that we choose to live in. By doing this Ohio will save money because individuals will have the supports that they need to gain and maintain their health, work and pay taxes, participate in their local community and grow the economy, and age in place with family and loved ones. The need for ER visits and hospitalizations will decrease. And long-term care facility placements, solely for the purpose of receiving sub-adequate personal care, will be uncommon. Now, I am not a businessperson, but I believe that this is an investment that Ohioans would get behind.

In closing, I am asking you to support the wage increase for all in-home Direct Care Workers in Ohio. Remember: The Disability Culture is the only culture that anyone can enter at any time!

People with disabilities have value and worth. We have experienced oppression, of the worst kind, and have stood up to our oppressors. We have fought for our right to be in the community with the necessary supports.

"Disability is a natural part of the human experience." Disability can occur at any point in life and range from mild to severe. The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes that what defines individuals with disabilities, their abilities, and their health outcomes more often depends on their community, including social and environmental circumstances. (*WHO 16 January 2018*)

Respectfully Submitted March 15, 2023

Maria A. Matzik (She / Her)
Host of the Breaking Silences Advocacy Committee
Consumer of the MyCare Ohio Program
mariammatzik@gmail.com
(937) 623-9351 cell