



Testimony to the Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
Ohio House of Representative
Cordell D. Brown
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Chairwoman Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the subcommittee, my name is Reverend Cordell Brown. I am the founder, former president and CEO of Echoing Hills, a statewide provider of services and supports for Ohioans with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

As you can see, I am also a person with a developmental disability myself, having been born with cerebral palsy in 1943. Twenty-two years later, in 1965, I heard Christ's call and knew at that moment what the Lord wanted me to do. He asked me to serve people with developmental disabilities, people like me. So, I said "yes" to the Lord. Not long after, Camp Echoing Hills, a camp for people with disabilities, was born with Jane my young bride by my side.

Echoing Hills is perhaps best known for its summer camp for individuals with developmental disabilities. For over 55 years, campers have come from every part of Ohio to spend a week swimming, fishing, and learning about Jesus and His love for them while doing all the things a typical camper would do at camp. While this week is fun for campers, it also serves as a needed respite for parents. It is a time for parents to take a mental health break, catch their breath, and recharge.

Now, in the final days of my life's journey, I want to ensure that Camp Echoing Hills exists beyond my earthly years, so I am asking for your support. Camp Echoing Hills and the other residential and educational services provided by Echoing Hills are at risk because of the worst **workforce crisis** in my lifetime.

Simply put, Echoing Hills is not able to pay a wage that is high enough to attract and retain the number of caregivers needed to provide services. Let me give you an example, in a typical summer, Camp Echoing Hills serves 350 campers. Unfortunately, this past summer only 167 persons with developmental disabilities attended camp. And even this does not tell the whole story as we had over 100 campers on our waitlist, and had to cancel 60 who were already scheduled to attend. The team shared with me about one mother who was distraught, crying and pleading to let her three children with developmental disabilities come to camp. She loved her children dearly but was looking forward to her first break in round-the-clock caregiving activities in over two years. They had to say no because they didn't have the staff to care for her children.

This is devastating because it means hundreds of people are missing out on the joys of summer camp and hundreds of parents won't get a break they deserve.

In residential services, there too, we are unable to provide the kind of care that ensures the dignity of each person that lives with us. Constant turnover in staff, unwilling to work for low wages, means our residents are typically provided care by staff with under six months of experience. Recent efforts to increase wages have helped some to stabilize our workforce, but this was done by deficit spending, a move that is not sustainable in the long-term.

So what is the solution? It's simple. Higher wages. As I'm sure you know, the wages Echoing Hills can pay caregivers are set by rates established and funded in the state budget. With higher and better-funded rates, Echoing Hills will be able to, in turn, pay our caregivers a higher wage.

And here is where each of you comes in. I'm asking you to say "yes" too. If not to the Lord, then to me. I'm asking that you say "yes" and increase wages for those providing care to people like me to \$20.00 an hour.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.