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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 submit this written testimony.

My name is Sandy Cinch, and I am currently the Vice President of Intermediate Care Facility Services for Hattie Larlham. I have worked in the field of developmental disabilities for the past 32 years. Taking care of and providing services to people with developmental disabilities is extremely enjoyable work and very rewarding work. It is also very hard work. I started working as a Direct Support Professional (DSP) providing direct care services to people with developmental disabilities in the early 1990s.

Hattie Larlham is a non-profit organization and one of the largest providers of services to people with developmental disabilities in Ohio. We serve over 1,500 people in Northeast Ohio and in the Columbus area. We take pride in what we do and provide excellent care and services. I work at our main campus location in Mantua, Ohio - which is home to 121 children and adults. Most of the people who live at the main campus for Hattie Larlham have very complex medical issues and some have a ventilator which is needed to survive.

As you know, the past several years have been extremely challenging for providers of developmental disabilities due to severe staffing shortages and inadequate funding. **We are in a crisis, and we have been in a crisis for quite some time. This crisis could be averted with additional Medicaid funding so that we can increase the hourly pay rate for the Direct Service Professionals (DSPs) and other employees who take care of and support people with developmental disabilities.** We have an opportunity through the current state budget process to provide much needed additional funding to the developmental disabilities provider network to address these current needs. We really need your help.

Right now, Hattie Larlham has over forty (40) individuals on a waiting list for residential placement in one of our facilities/homes. We receive at least ten (10) requests each week from parents, guardians, the County Boards of Developmental Disabilities, and others seeking residential placement or respite services. Given the current staffing crisis, we are unable to admit new residents or provide respite services at the main campus location for Hattie Larlham. We have not been able to provide respite services since early 2020 because we do not have enough staff to safely provide this service. This has been a hardship on the many families who have used our respite services on a regular basis over the years.

A good foundation of any provider of developmental disabilities services are the employees. Hattie Larlham relies on DSPs, Registered Nurses, Licensed Practical Nurses, Respiratory Therapists, and other staff to meet the complex needs of the people we serve. We will not be able to continue to provide the support and care for the people we currently serve unless we are able to address our staffing needs.

The starting pay rate of \$14.00 per hour to \$16.00 per hour is not enough to attract new employees to consider working as a DSP. We need the help and assistance of the Ohio Legislature to address this staffing crisis and to provide additional funding to allow providers of developmental disabilities services to pay DSPs and other employees an acceptable hourly rate.

I believe that the starting pay rates for DSPs should be at minimum \$20.00 per hour. Without additional Medicaid funding, providers of developmental disabilities services in Ohio would be forced to close, limit programs or services even more so than what we have done already, or we would have to significantly reduce the size of our operations. It is crucial that we fix this funding issue now so that we can continue to effectively serve people who need our help.

Many thanks to you and your colleagues, the Governor, and the leadership at the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities for the additional funding for providers of developmental disabilities in the FY 2024-2025 state budget. This increase is an important step to help Hattie Larlham and other providers address our staffing needs but is it not the full funding solution that is needed.

Thank you for your support of Ohioans with developmental disabilities. I look forward to a state budget that will provide the necessary funding to stabilize the funding system and allow us to meet the needs of the people we serve and would very much appreciate your help. People with developmental disabilities count on service providers like us to assist with their daily needs.



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