

**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 Nancy Nebenzahl, and I am the mother of Katie Nebenzahl, who lives at 651 Wyleswood Dr., Berea, Ohio. Katie is not able to speak for herself, so I am speaking for her.

Katie receives essential services from Koinonia Homes, located in Cuyahoga County and Lake County. Koinonia Homes, a nonprofit service provider in northeast Ohio, provides vital residential, transportation, day programming, and behavioral health services to adults with developmental disabilities. They are administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD).

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 Koinonia's ability to provide the critical supports and services that Katie, and others like her rely on.

Katie has intellectual developmental disabilities (IDD), as well as physical impairments. She requires around the clock care, because of her blindness, limited ability to verbalize her needs, lack of judgement and reasoning skills, and behavioral and physical challenges. Her housemates also require around the clock care. The staff that provide this care, Direct Support Professionals. (DSPs), are critical for the survival of these women. That may sound a bit dramatic, but it is literally true; these women would come to harm without the care DSPs provide. Not one of these women is able to function on her own. All need help with basic daily activities: use of the bathroom, donning clothes and shoes, meal preparation, shopping for food, getting to workshop or even just going for a walk outside. None of this would be possible without Koinonia Home's DSPs. Over the past several years, Koinonia has struggled to continue to provide the crucial around the clock care Katie and her housemates require, due to limited rate of pay they can offer. Just getting coverage for the bare minimum of services within the home is a daily challenge. This situation will likely not improve without an increase to adequate funding for IDD organizations.

Ohio's most vulnerable populations should not lack access to other critical services, supports, and meaningful activities. Adults with IDD deserve to live in and be a part of their own communities. They deserve a life of dignity and respect. Everyone, regardless of disability, deserves a chance to be a contributing member of their community. The services Koinonia and similar organizations provide throughout the northeast Ohio community are essential exactly for these reasons. But because of the current funding level, Katie and her housemate's no longer are able to get out into the community; there is not enough staff to manage their care during outings, so they are basically house bound.

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 Kononia. I 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 IDD organizations recruit and retain the workforce needed to continue to provide quality services.

March 16, 2023

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With your leadership, together we can ensure these services are available to those Ohioans that so greatly need them! Please help protect and improve the lives of these most vulnerable individuals, and advocate for increased funding for IDD providers. Katie and so many other's with IDD are counting on you.

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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