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SFY 2024-25 Operating Budget Testimony

House Finance Health and Human Services Subcommittee

Chairwoman Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and esteemed committee members,

Over the past several years the developmental disability (DD) provider community in Ohio has been significantly challenged by staffing and funding issues. **In fact, we are in a crisis.** Our most pressing current need is for additional Medicaid funding so that we can increase the hourly rate paid to Direct Service Professionals (DSPs) and other employees. We have a unique opportunity through the current state budget process to provide much needed additional funding to the DD provider network to address the current needs. We need your help.

I currently serve as a member of the Board of Directors for the Hattie Larlham Foundation. I also am General Manager/CEO of Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority (*PARTA*) and President of the Ohio Public Transit Association (OPTA).

Hattie Larlham, a not-for-profit organization, is one of the largest providers of services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Ohio. Hattie Larlham provides services to over 1,500 individuals at approximately seventy (70) locations in Northeast Ohio and the Franklin County area. We have over 800 employees.

Hattie Larlham's flagship location is the Hattie Larlham Center for Children with Disabilities in Mantua, Ohio (Portage County). The Center is an Intermediate Care Facility (ICF) and is home to 121 residents who, in addition to their intellectual or developmental disabilities, also have complex medical issues. The Center had been in operation since 1961, and we have a proud tradition of providing excellent services to the persons we serve. There also are Hattie Larlham locations in your district.

We thank you and your colleagues, the Governor, and the leadership at DODD for your efforts and support over the past three (3) years to help us and our colleagues deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and the staffing crisis. I know that Governor DeWine has included additional funding for DD providers in the FY 2024-2025 state budget. This increase is an important start to help

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Hattie Larlham and other providers address their staffing needs but is not the full funding solution that is needed and more needs to be done.

At present, we have over forty (40) individuals on a waiting list for residential placement in one of our Intermediate care facilities, supported living, or waiver homes. We receive, on average, over ten (10) requests each week from parents, guardians, the county DD boards, and others seeking placement or respite services. Given the current staffing crisis, we are unable to meet those needs, and we are currently not accepting new residents at the Center.

The backbone of any DD provider is its 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. Hattie Larlham will not be able to continue to provide the support and care for the individuals we currently serve unless we are able to address our staffing needs.

It should be obvious that starting salaries of \$14.00 per hour to \$16.00 per hour are not enough to attract 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 DD providers to pay its DSPs and other employees an acceptable hourly rate. Particularly in this tight labor market, it is critical to pay wages that will attract and maintain the dedicated workforce needed to care for this vulnerable population of Ohioans.

We believe that starting salaries for DSPs need to be at a minimum of \$20 per hour. Without additional funding providers, Ohio will be forced to close, limit programs or services even more than what has already occurred, or significantly reduce the size of their operations. If we do not fix this funding issue now – who will?

Thank you for your support of Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We look forward to a state budget that will provide the needed funding to stabilize the DD system and allow us to meet the needs of the people we serve. They count on us every day for their needs – and



we cannot let them down.

Sincerely,

Claudia B. Amrhein  
General Manager/CEO  
PARTA

President  
Ohio Public Transit Association

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