



Testimony to the Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
Ohio House of Representatives
Jason D. Abodeely
March 22, 2023

Chairwoman Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the subcommittee, my name is Jason Abodeely. I am honored this day to follow courageous testimony delivered by many who previously represented the needs of people with developmental disabilities to this committee. I would like to begin by acknowledging their unique realities, and offering a heartfelt thank you to them for the courage they displayed in sharing their stories.

I come before you today to offer a forward-looking view of what Sunshine Communities believes is possible with further assistance. Our message today is an attempt to inspire hope by sharing real-life examples that we believe prove our collective ask can make significant differences in the lives of Ohioans.

Sunshine Communities (formerly Sunshine Children's Home) supports a community of over a thousand people in Northwest Ohio. We are a faith-based not-for-profit agency that began creating true community for all Ohioans in 1950. Most of the people we support have critically high levels of medical and clinical needs, including but not limited to a dozen infants and adults who are ventilator dependent.

Like many of our peers, Sunshine experienced a slow and steady decline in direct care professional applications beginning in March of 2020. The workforce crisis forced us to reduce the number of people we supported from over 500 to just under 250 per day, and total employment fell from over 600 Ohioans to just under 400. We were facing a moral dilemma without a viable solution.

The moral dilemma before us was gut-wrenching to say the least. We had a choice to make: sit back and watch services (and possibly quality of care) continue to decline until we close our doors or significantly invest in our workforce without any guarantee of making payroll in a few years. We decided that both might have ultimately resulted in the same end-game. It was due to that conclusion that we decided to invest. I would like to offer that extraordinary leap of faith, and the resulting success we have experienced, as proof that appropriately compensating direct support professionals can indeed stabilize a system in decline.

Over the past three years we have increased compensation for direct support professionals by approximately 50% in an effort to create stability. Those increases resulted in an average rate of pay for direct support professionals of nearly \$20/hr., significantly more job applicants and dramatically improved retention.

The positive impact of consistent staffing has resulted in better quality of life for those supported, which is the true purpose of our existence. We have moved past the health and safety measures put in place during the pandemic and are now re-engaging the greater community again to the benefit of all involved.



page-2

I would be remiss if I did not also mention that a few of those infants who were once dependent on 24/7 vent-care, are now walking and even running, talking and reading. To the surprise of everyone except for us, some are even planning potential returns to traditional home and family life. We are once again changing lives in ways few thought possible.

Chairwoman Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the subcommittee, these moves have sadly come with a cost that we cannot sustain. Our last three budgets have an aggregate loss of over \$11M which includes a forecasted \$3.9M loss for calendar year 2023. Over 70 years of community fund raising support and pandemic assistance has enabled us to make these dramatic increases, but time is not on our side.

We can positively impact lives and offer Ohioans meaningful careers that provide them with solid moral and ethical rewards while also allowing them to raise happy and healthy families. We are simply not capable of accomplishing these outcomes without funding that recognizes the incredible work being done by the direct support professionals and nurses throughout our system. Our ability to maintain where we are today will depend on the actions of the General Assembly.

I would like to close by acknowledging that the vast majority of our peers simply could not have made the decision we did. It goes without saying that we were uniquely positioned to take such a risk. Sunshine took a leap of faith that we felt had to be made in order to honor our mission and protect those who counted on us the most. We did so with the hope that the future would take care of itself. Without further assistance however, like many others, our mission will come to a close in just a few years.

On behalf of all those who support our mission, thank you for your time. It is an honor I do not take for granted. Everyone at Sunshine would like to leave you with a sense that the system we have in place can indeed work.

Chairwoman Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the subcommittee, thank you again, and I'm happy to take any questions members of this subcommittee may have.

Testimony to the Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
Ohio House of Representative
Jason D. Abodeely
March 22, 2023