



**NEW AVENUES TO
INDEPENDENCE, INC.**
The Path to Dignity and Achievement

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 Karen Knavel and I am the CEO of New Avenues to Independence Inc., and we are located in Cuyahoga, Lake and Ashtabula Counties. We are an organization that provides intermediate care facilities for individuals with intellectual disabilities and support services through the home and community-based waiver program 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 our ability to provide the critical supports on which the people we serve and their families rely.

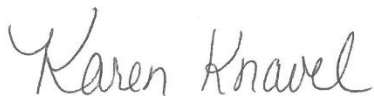
New Avenues serves 150 men and women with disabilities in Northeast Ohio. These individuals rely on over 200 DSPs to provide assistance with activities of daily living such as personal care, meal preparation, and medication administration. DSPs are the backbone of long-term supports and services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Prior to the pandemic, there was already a well-documented DSP workforce crisis, with high turnover and vacancy rates. These issues have only gotten worse since that time.

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3615 Superior Avenue, Suite 4404A, Cleveland, OH 44114, 216-481-1909, www.newavenues.net

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 New Avenues. **We 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 us recruit and retain the workforce needed to continue to provide our quality services.**

With your leadership, together we can ensure these services are available to the Ohioans that so greatly need them! **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.**



Karen Knavel

kknavel@newavenues.net

3615 Superior Ave. E.

Suite 4404A

Cleveland, Ohio 44114

(216) 767-4024