

Chairman Caruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and the rest of the Health and Human Services subcommittee, thank you for your time today, my name is Larry Rodriguez. For quite some time, I've been relying on home healthcare workers and they have been very helpful for me. But I've noticed in the last few years that they are being overworked, and the home healthcare companies cannot get anyone new in the door to work for them. I am referring to companies like PHC, New Life Community Care, Almost Family, and many others. They have not been able to pay their workers correctly due to a lack of funding from the state. Home healthcare workers should be paid no less than \$20 per hour with no exceptions, as they have one of the most difficult and most essential professions in our society. I also believe there should be incentives for them to get vehicle repairs or new vehicles, due to the fact that they have to put a lot of mileage on their own transport in order to take clients to medical appointments, grocery shopping, and much more. I would also like to see their mileage reimbursement significantly increased from 38 cents per mile.

A lack of funding means a lack of care and workers who are stretched thin. When we are not taking care of care workers, they have a much harder time taking care of people like me. When you don't pay them, they don't come, and while I am extremely independent and hold down a job, my disability means that I must still rely on other people for many basic errands and transportation that others take for granted. Also, due to the lack of funding, a lot of my friends who go to day programs end up being improperly cared for as well. Their hygiene is sometimes very poor and their nutrition suffers as well. Many Ohioans struggle with disabilities every day, and a properly funded care infrastructure is critical for us to live healthy, fulfilling, and independent lives.

I also believe that there should be more funding for adults with disabilities to stay in their own houses and make modifications to suit their unique needs. Many of us would prefer to be as independent as possible instead of being put into congregate settings, but the cost of these kinds of modifications is prohibitively expensive for people on fixed incomes. Finally, I am concerned with the overreliance on contractors like Provide A Ride for medical transport and paratransit. These private transportation companies do not maintain the same standards of care, accessibility, and professionalism that I have come to appreciate from those associated with transit authorities or medical providers. More money is needed for these state funded entities to invest in their own vehicle fleets and training rather than contracting out such vital services to third parties.

I would like to take one moment to remember the life of Judy Heumann, the founder of the American Disability Rights movement, who passed away last week. She was a mentor and fighter for millions of people like me, and I hope that by speaking up I can continue to honor her memory.