

Health and Human Services Subcommittee  
March 23, 2023

Danielle South, Unit Manager, Heinzerling Community  
House Bill 33 Proponent Testimony

Chairwoman Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Health and Human Services Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide my testimony today.

My name is Danielle South and I work at the Heinzerling Community, an Intermediate Care Facility or ICF, that is regulated by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities. I am here today to testify in support of the increased funding for direct service providers caring for individuals with developmental disabilities.

I started this job at the age of 18 and started working with residents who are still on my unit today. Coming up on 17 years now, I have been there for them and their daily routines. In some cases, I have been with my residents longer or as long as my own children. Each morning all residents are given baths or partials to start their day. Some residents require up to 4 people to lift and reposition. All of our residents at Heinzerling are wheelchair bound. We have children who go to school, and adults who go to outside programming, which have to complete the same tasks any other child/adult would. Put on clean clothes, teeth brushed breakfast ate, and out the door so they don't miss their bus. Those who stay home and are not able to go to outside programming get all their daily care needs done then come out in the activity room (or what some people would call a common room) and work on goals, we do activities with them, when we have staff we get to take them out in the community on field trips, we try to keep their days as entertaining as possible and then they lay down and rest in the activity room. At this time we have our residents that went to outside programming getting off of the bus and we are now helping them with their snacks, mouthcare and getting them out of their chairs to lay down, changing their attends and letting them rest for a while before getting back up for dinner.

There are absolutely days where these tasks are not our favorite things to do, or even getting to work just simply is not what I would like to do knowing how short staffed we are going to be. But just like the reward of seeing my children's faces at the end of a long workday. There is just something special about seeing my residents smile and get excited when I walk on the unit. Putting a smile on their face is what keeps me going. Seeing how happy they are when they get to visit a splash pad, go to the zoo or getting to tell them they get to go see Shania Twain or Garth Brooks in concert just to name a few. Understanding many of our residents lives would be so much different if they were not at the Heinzerling Community creates such a sense of pride for me and the rest of the staff. Arriving to that understanding has proven to be more difficult now than it once was.

When I started as a Direct Care Assistant or DCA, I was provided an opportunity to connect with my residents. I was able to spend a lot of one on one time with more than a few people. Creating a connection, building a bond, and allowing for trust between myself and the different residents on an individual level. Getting the chance to really dig in, get to know them and go through life with them has been an experience I will never forget. Most of our residents cannot talk or express how they are feeling but knowing them on a deeper level most of the time we can tell when they are sick or something is just not right by looking at them. After a number of years I realized the work I had put in granted me what I still refer to now as my "Bonus Family".

Our staffing issues does not allow for these types of relationships for others. There are not enough people on our staff that allows for our residents to thrive. We are unable to get that one on one time that proved to be so critical in how I see my job. I want nothing more then for the newer staff to be able to build the kind of relationship that I myself and other older staff were able to do. But our current state does not allow for such in depth connections with our residents. When we have a more stable staffing situation, it provides a nicer home life for our residents as well. Knowing the people, they see on a day-to-day basis helps them understand their environment that much quicker and lets them form bonds with the staff of their choosing. Just like us our residents have their favorite people as well.

Gaining, and sustaining staff would open so many opportunities for our residents. Both at home, and out in the community. The environment at home for them would be much more structured. As we all know a good home has sound structure. Maintaining staff would allow for myself and others in my position to take on the mentor role. Helping our new DCA's understand the details of the job. It would allow for me to be able to step in when a DCA may feel like they were drowning in their assignment. Desperate for answers. Answers I know I can provide, answers that when I was a DCA I had a great manager provide to me, but currently can't since I myself am also taken an assignment right next to them. Some days 2 assignments at the same time depending on how our staffing is that day, all while still having to be the unit manager on top of all that.

I have watched a lot of great people leave Heinzerling for a better paying job. Most did not want to make that choice, but we have a lot of single mothers that work at Heinzerling and only have a one income household and cant make ends meet at this pay. Additional funds would help us retain the small amount of staff that we currently have and bring more reliable staff into our buildings. We have staff leaving for an extra dollar or two, but the bad thing is they aren't just leaving Heinzerling they are leaving the healthcare field all together since the pay is not there for them. I still keep in touch with a lot of old staff, and they all talk about how much they miss it, but the pay is not worth the work. Some have even stated that if they raised the pay, they would consider coming back!

Thank you again for the opportunity to testimony today and thank you for your consideration of additional funding for DD services. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.