



koinonia

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 Howard Pincham, and I am the Chief Information Officer of the Independence, Ohio-based Koinonia Homes, Inc. Koinonia provides intermediate care facilities for individuals with intellectual disabilities and/or residential, day, and employment services through the home and community-based waiver program administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). We serve in several Ohio counties surrounding the greater Cleveland area. Our team of 500 employees are proud to provide essential services to more than 350 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

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 (DSPs), threatens our ability to provide the critical supports on which our Individuals, those are the people we serve, and their families rely.

My most challenging responsibility is to anticipate future opportunities and risks in the technology space. You have a similar responsibility, but on a far greater scale because you govern the citizens and resources of this great state. Koinonia, uses technology to save time traveling to and from meetings. We use technology to confirm that our Individuals' medication doses and times match what is prescribed. We use technology to coordinate work schedules and so many other things. Given the shortage of DSPs, Koinonia's technology must become a force multiplier for our DSPs. It will do that in time.

Right now, our existing staff work very long hours. My organization has a difficult time recruiting and retaining DSPs, especially when the online retailer's warehouse in our community pays 20% greater wages for simply handling packages! With no disrespect to package handlers' effort, it is obvious to me that the DSP work is a greater call. DSPs must achieve and maintain life-saving skills and other certified training each year. DSPs juggle the mental and physical effort required to care for people who act and communicate differently, while navigating the scrutiny of regulators, guardians and family members. DSPs sacrifice family time when called to pick up shifts when homes are short-staffed or when they need hours to make up for the low wage rate.

I need your help. Years of I/DD funding that has not kept up with inflation and wage increases has taken its toll on Koinonia staff. This situation has hampered our ability to properly serve our precious individuals. Our fellow citizens, both Individuals and DSPs suffer because of this. Our technology cannot make up for this gap.

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 Koinonia. I 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. 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.

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