



Health and Human Services Subcommittee
March 23, 2023

Derek Fletcher, M.D.
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 Derek Fletcher, M.D. I am a physician at Nationwide Children's Hospital working in the Complex Care Division. I also hold the title of Assistant Professor of Pediatrics through Ohio State University, and I serve as the Medical Director at Heinzerling Community, an Intermediate Care Facility or ICF, that is regulated by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities. Although I am unable to testify in person today, it is my honor to submit a statement in support of increased funding for direct service providers caring for individuals with developmental disabilities.

In my professional role at Nationwide Children's Hospital, I provide direct patient care to both children and adults with multiple chronic medical conditions of a complex nature, often involving technology dependence such as gastrostomy tubes, tracheostomy tubes, ventilator support, oxygen support, pulse oximetry monitoring, wheelchair, and lift dependence, and the like. These patients are entirely similar to those residents receiving care at Heinzerling Community.

My role as Medical Director at Heinzerling Community is to conduct weekly rounds, providing both acute illness care, as well as routine health maintenance care; to be available for after-hours calls; and to assist in the formation of medical policies at the Community. I entered the field of Complex Care when I graduated from residency in 2005 and joined the Heinzerling Community as its Medical Director in 2016. Providing care to the medically complex has been my entire career.

I would like to impress upon this subcommittee the uniquely vulnerable nature of Heinzerling residents. All residents at the facility have severe or profound intellectual disability, meaning they have no cognitive ability to care for themselves in addition to their physical disabilities. Most have technology dependence as described earlier. Most have come from loving homes that simply could not care for their loved ones due to those complex needs. Every resident at Heinzerling Community survives due to the dedication and passion of its staff. They would be unable to survive any other way.



As an attending physician at Nationwide Children's Hospital who is often responsible for finding long term placement for medically complex patients, I can say there are never enough beds at Heinzerling. I am confident this is the majority opinion at the hospital. There are never enough beds.

As the Medical Director at Heinzerling, I know the reason for this problem. The shortage is staff, not beds. Without appropriate staff numbers, these complex residents can not be cared for safely. Without appropriate staffing, these residents have no where to go.

Among the innumerable consequences of the COVID pandemic, was its withering effect on staffing numbers at ICFs such as Heinzerling. Staffing numbers fell during the pandemic and have yet to return to baseline. It is important that they do or "there will never be enough beds." As is often the case during disasters, the most vulnerable suffer the most. Higher and more competitive wages for ICF workers would dramatically improve recruitment and retention of quality staff to provide care for these most vulnerable residents. I therefore support the passage of House Bill 33 for that purpose. I respectfully call on your support as well.

Thank you again for taking into consideration my written statement in support of House Bill 33. It is my hope that your approval of additional funding for DD services will significantly improve the lives of the patients to whom I have dedicated my career.

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