

Testimony on HB 33
Senate Finance Committee

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirilo, Ranking Member Sykes, and esteemed committee members,

My name is Karen Wojtala, I am a mother and guardian of an adult son with Developmental Disabilities (DD) and a Shared Living Provider through Koinonia Homes.

I am very supportive of the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Hauck for DODD and the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Miller for Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD).

The Ohio DD Crisis hit home for our family. Our son had lived in supported living through Koinonia Homes, with support of Direct Support Professionals (DSP's) for over 15 years. Sadly, 18 months ago, Koinonia could no longer provide services to my son and his roommate due to the severe staffing shortages. We brought our son home to live with us, as there were no other viable options, and I became his Shared Living Provider. This has been an adjustment, but we love our son deeply and want the best for him. Since that time, I have not been able to secure DSP support through HPC (Home Personal Care), as well as struggles to find Respite Care. This is all due to lack of DSP resources. Their job is a challenging one, and need to be paid an equitable salary to perform their duties.

DSP's are an essential life line for people with DD. My son lived in an apartment that he was very proud of! He liked his independence, and most of the staff that supported him in everyday life. Staff helped him with medications, food preparation, daily household chores, activities in the community, and his CPAP Machine at night. Securing qualified, trained and consistent staff is an essential support. This is part of the Independent living philosophy which is based on the belief that person with disabilities have the same rights as persons without disabilities to participate in and contribute to community life.

DSP funding is entirely managed by Medicare, and has not offered a competitive wage for many years. The cost of recruiting, hiring and retraining alone, would stabilize the funding for these jobs, if they were offered a commiserative salary.

As an aging parent, I wonder how he will be cared for when I am gone. I wonder when I will be able to get a break as his primary everything. I wonder when and how he will transition back to live his best independent life with the necessary supports.

The budget initiatives for Ohioans with developmental disabilities, guided by the leadership of Director Hauck and Miller, will reinforce and rebuild the services provided the House-passed levels. 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 today by Koinonia. We encourage this committee to further invest additional funds on top of the House-passed budget for DODD and maintain funding for OOD at.

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