

**Testimony on SFY 24/25 Operating Budget  
House Finance Committee**

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and esteemed committee members, I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Connie Boros and I am the VP, Public Policy, Advocacy and Engagement for the Achievement Centers for Children (ACC). ACC has three locations in Cuyahoga County (Highland Hills, Westlake and Strongsville). 95% of the clients served in FY 22 resided in Cuyahoga, Lorain, Medina and Summit Counties. We also provided services for individuals who reside in 12 additional Counties. We provide a continuum of services including Recreation and Adult Day, Therapy, Education and Family Support for children and adult with disabilities and their families. Clients utilize the Home and Community Based Waivers administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) to attend our Adult Day Program, Summer Day and Overnight camp, and Year-Round Respite Weekends. Our team of 115+ FTE employees plus our 80+ seasonal employees are proud to provide essential services to 2000 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 (DSP), threatens our ability to provide the critical supports our clients and families rely upon. The budget proposed in HB 33 is a good foundation to help our system combat these many changes.

Our Recreation and Adult Day services are provided on a beautiful 52 acre park like setting at Camp Cheerful in Strongsville, Ohio. Camp Cheerful feels like home for our campers and adult day participants. Many of our individuals participate in multiple programs at ACC. Over 60% of the individuals in our Adult Day Program participated in another recreation program with ACC prior to choosing our Adult Day Program – they were able to choose to receive their Adult Day Services at their “second home”. Having provided services at our Cheerful location since 1947, there are many more people who would like to access services at Camp Cheerful but staffing constraints limit our ability to serve additional individuals.

Challenges related to staff recruitment and retention directly affect clients, families and staff. Unfortunately waiver reimbursement rates for both Camp and Adult Day Services do not sufficiently support paying our talented, compassionate and dedicated staff a competitive rate. Not being able to add team members has limited ACC’s ability to accept new clients. Retention payments provided to retain Direct Support Professionals (DSP’s) benefitted the staff but we know these retention dollars are time-limited. Without reassurances of their future wages staff are limited in their ability to make future financial decisions and may still feel compelled to explore other employment opportunities. An increase in Waiver reimbursement rates will result in increased wages for DSP’s positioning ACC to better recruit and retain our professional caretakers.

March 28, 2023

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ACC provides a respectable health insurance plan for all full-time employees. Employees elect to participate and they are responsible for a portion of the monthly plan costs. Several of our DSP's shared that they cannot afford the out of pocket costs and because of their wage and their family size they qualify for subsidized health care. One of our employees shared the challenge of finding a mental health provider that accepted her subsidized plan. The lack of options caused many of the appointments her son needed to participate in being scheduled during the work day. This caused added stress for the employee due to her concern about missing "too much" work and it provided coverage challenges when she was absent. A former staff person resigned due to having inadequate childcare. It was inadequate because she qualified for subsidized child care. When circumstances resulted in her child having to find a new childcare center there were no openings at other subsidized center leaving her without childcare for an extended period of time. She had to resign and utilize additional public assistance to get through the challenging time she was facing. ACC lost a valuable employee. Had ACC been receiving higher reimbursement rates resulting in higher pay for our employee she would have been positioned to explore many more childcare centers as a self-paying customer. There would not have been a significant gap in childcare. Clients of ACC would not have had to say a sad good-bye to a staff person they interacted with five-days a week. These are professionals that take great pride in their work, they ensure the safety of our participants and provide a highly engaging day of programming to add value to their lives. Despite performing their job at the highest level and despite our families and ACC holding them in high regard the inadequate waiver rates do not allow us to pay employees at a rate that reflects their value. For some staff it positions them to require subsidized assistance to ensure the health and safety for themselves and their families. The Achievement Centers for Children would like to serve more children and adults with disabilities.

We want to pay a higher wage to our employees. We are truly grateful for the Governor's proposed budget initiatives, guided by the leadership of Director Hauck and Miller. We believe this is a great foundation to reinforce and rebuild the services provided by ACC. We encourage this committee to approve the Governor's budget proposal for DODD and to invest additional dollars through budget amendment HC0656 into these vital services to raise direct support professional wages to at least an average of \$20.64.

With your leadership, together we can ensure these services are available to Ohioans with disabilities and their families who need them. Thank you again, for the opportunity and privilege to bring my concerns before you today.

With Gratitude,

*Connie Boros*

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