

Thank you, Chairperson Matt Dolan, Vice-Chairperson Jerry Cirino, Ranking Member Vernon Sykes, and esteemed members of the Senate Finance Committee, for allowing me this opportunity to share my heartfelt testimony on HB 33.

My name is Theresa Sweeny, and I stand before you today not only as a disability ally and advocate but also as an independent provider and a mother to an adult child battling an ultra rare disease. The struggles we face daily are overwhelming, and I implore you to recognize the profound challenges both providers and consumers encounter in accessing care through the Ohio HCBS Waivers.

According to Olmstead, disabled individuals have a legal right to be with their families or reside within their chosen communities to receive the care they desperately need. However, the Home and Community Based System of waivers administered by the Ohio Department of Medicaid, Ohio Department of Aging, and Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities is in a state of utter chaos. It demands a complete overhaul and genuine oversight. It is time for Ohio to hold state agencies and managed care organizations accountable, something we have failed to do in the past. Urgent and substantial increases in Medicaid reimbursement rates are needed to address this nursing crisis that we are experiencing firsthand. Unfortunately, it appears that our cries for help have fallen on deaf ears, as the severity of the crisis and the abysmally low Medicaid reimbursement rates seem to go unnoticed.

It is inconceivable to me that, despite the overwhelming volume of testimonies shared over the past weeks about this nursing crisis, legislators in our great state of Ohio fail to comprehend the urgent need to immediately and significantly increase Medicaid reimbursement rates for HCBS Waivers.

We should not find ourselves in a position where we are begging for assistance. As state legislators, you possess the power to determine whether my friends live or die. If you do not allocate the necessary funds to adequately support Medicaid reimbursement for HCBS without delay, and if you do not act outside the confines of this budget's timeline, it will speak volumes about either your lack of understanding regarding this crisis or your indifference toward it.

Now is your opportunity to demonstrate to Ohio HCBS providers that they are valued, respected, and integral to the disability community within our state. This is your chance to make a resounding statement to all the suffering consumers and their families who are in desperate need of nurses to care for their loved ones, exhausted from enduring yet another arduous shift. Show them that you truly care. Help children and adults alike transition from hospital settings back to the warmth and comfort of their own homes where they rightfully belong. Enable my friends not just to survive but to thrive within the communities they have chosen.

Please, I implore you, prove me wrong. Prove to me, to all my disabled friends, and most importantly, to my son, that we are not alone in this battle. Show us that our lives, our struggles, and our well-being matter to you.

Sincerely,

Theresa Sweeny