

Chairperson Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 33.

My name is Melissa Day. I currently reside in Columbus Ohio and work full time as an advocate for Ohio's Client Assistance Program.

Prior to joining the Ohio Client Assistance Program in 2013, I traveled the state of Ohio in 2003 spreading disability awareness as Ms. Wheelchair America Ohio and worked with former state Senator Steve Stivers to help implement Ohio's Medicaid Buy In for Workers with Disability program. In 2009, I obtained my law degree from Capital University Law School.

My testimony today is to address the need for a pay rate increase for ALL MY DIRECT CARE WORKS, which includes nurses' aide, Licensed Practical Nurses, and Registered Nurses who have chosen to provide care to individuals like myself who receive Ohio's Home Care Waiver.

In 1994, I was a typical 15 year old teenage going about my life with hopes and dreams for the future of graduating High School, getting a job, owning a home and having a family. You know living the American Dream. However, that summer on July 21st I became paralyzed from the neck down after diving into a pool at church camp on Kelly's Island. This accident destroyed my hopes and dreams for months but thankfully, my parents worked hard to find every resource available in Ohio to bring me home. For the past 28 years, I have been able to live a normal life and thrive in the community all because Ohio's Home Care Waiver program and my dedicated nurses. I even own my home.

Because of the level my spinal cord injury, I require at least 21 hours of personal aid services to assist me with daily living activities such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, and shopping. I require a nurse to catheterize me at least 4 times every day; and since my mother died 3 years ago, I require a nurse to be with from 10 pm to 8am. During my 10 hour shifts, my nurses take care of emptying my bowel\,s, cath me throughout the night and morning, and then baths and dresses me. In order to cover all the care I need, I have to use both Independent Providers and Home Health Agencies. I am blessed to have one of my dedicated nurses here with me today. Monique Minor is an Independent Provider with the Ohio Department of Medicaid and has been providing most of my crucial care for 23 years.

It is unjustified for this committee to provide a raise only for developmental disability care workers through funding from the county boards of developmental disabilities. I have a developmental disability but my level of care requires I be on the Ohio Home Care Waiver, which I've been blessed to receive for 28 years. How can you justify increasing pay for one group of individuals and leave out the rest to suffer. My aid provides care to me and is only receiving \$11 an hour. My dedicated Independent Provider nurses have had to deal with a pay cut of 50 percent in 2015. The Base rate, which is the first hour, decreased from \$56 to \$25.89 and the unit rate, every hour after that, decreased from \$20 to \$16.68. Over the past 8 years,

nurses providing care to Ohio home care waiver program recipients have only been provided a pay rate increase of \$1.64 for the base rate and a \$2.12 increase for the unit rate. Let me ask you a question, Would you remain at a job that provides no benefits, pays so little or one that cuts your pay in half and then takes years to offer this type of a raise for compensation?

With the core inflation averaged at 2.87% per year between 2015 and 2023 (vs all consumer price index inflation of 3.07%), for an inflation total of 25.42% and other jobs paying more money, many nurses' aides, independent providers and agency nurses have left home health care, which has made it extremely difficult for me and others to find nurses to fill shifts. Before my mother died of cancer, she was my aid and had to fill in when nurses could not fill the shift or was a no show. Now each month as I schedule every single shift, I pray I do not have to ask friends to provide my most intimate care needs or have to go the hospital.

Now is the time to increase pay rates for ALL of Ohio's Direct Care Workforce not just those who qualify for DODD waivers. Individuals like my self receiving care funded by Medicaid and individuals age 60 and over being cared for by Ohio's Aging system deserve and require a rate increase to keep receiving quality care in the community. Heaven forbid one day you become disabled by injury, accident, or illness and you end up requiring the same or higher level of care from Medicaid or the Aging system. Therefore, I desperately request that you increase the pay rate for all direct care workers not just a select few. They and their patients, including myself cannot wait another 2 years. If you do not, I am deeply concerned that my dedicated nurses will seek better employment to take of care of themselves and their family. If this happens, I will have no choice but to sell my house, resign from my job, and move into a nursing home. Please do not let this happen to me.

Thank you again.