



Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities

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Testimony of Kevin L. Miller, Director
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Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Leader Antonio, and distinguished committee members, my name is Kevin Miller, and I am the Director of Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD). I am pleased to present our 2024-2025 Biennial Budget for your consideration. This budget reinforces Governor Mike DeWine and Lt. Governor Jon Husted's commitment to Ohioans with disabilities and marks a historic investment that will positively impact their lives now and for years to come.

Governor DeWine and Lt. Governor Husted have entrusted OOD to lead the state's efforts to ensure Ohioans with disabilities are not left behind. Each year OOD works with more than 34,000 eligible individuals with all types of disabilities, beginning at age 14. In partnership with approximately 300 providers throughout the state, we deliver direct, personalized services to help individuals with disabilities find and retain employment. If an individual with a disability is unable to work, then OOD's continuum of service assists more than 134,000 Ohioans annually through our Division of Disability Determination, which adjudicates medical eligibility for Social Security disability benefits.

Investment in the Future of Ohioans with Disabilities

Through Governor DeWine and Lt. Governor Husted's budget OOD will strategically expand programs and services to ensure that the employment needs of all Ohioans with disabilities are met. Governor DeWine and Lt. Governor Husted continue to bring in-demand jobs to Ohio. Through existing partnerships with Ohio Technical Centers, community colleges, career centers, and other training programs, OOD will support Ohioans with disabilities to earn short-term credentials needed for these in-demand, well-paying jobs.

Governor DeWine and Lt. Governor Husted's Executive Budget will allow OOD to expand the Ohio Transition Support Partnership with the Ohio Department of Education to serve more students

with disabilities to successfully transition to post-secondary education and employment. OOD will also expand Ohio College2Careers to serve more college students with disabilities to complete their education, start a career, and earn higher wages.

Supporting employers to diversify and strengthen their workforce by including individuals with disabilities is vital to Ohio's economic growth. OOD's Division of Employer and Innovation Services supports employer partners to meet their workforce needs. Some examples of these partnerships include the Cleveland Clinic, Giant Eagle, Amazon, AVI Foodsystems, Southern Ohio Medical Center, Discount Drug Mart, Procter & Gamble, and Premier Health.

Through OOD, employers have access to qualified candidates who are motivated to work. Individuals with disabilities gain opportunities to enter or remain in the workforce, demonstrate their abilities, contribute to the overall success of Ohio's economy, earn a sustainable wage, and live with purpose and increased independence.

Recent federal data indicates that 55% of individuals exiting OOD services are employed one year later, outperforming the national average by nearly 15%. While job placement is an essential support to employers, retention is equally as critical. OOD will work with our more than 700 employer partners to help them retain qualified workers with disabilities.

Accessible Ohio

The Accessible Ohio initiative will create the first-ever coordinated effort in Ohio to support Ohio's cities, counties, state agencies, attractions, and venues to be accessible and inclusive. Ohio is at its best when everyone can participate in all this great state has to offer. Accessible Ohio Specialists will be on hand to work directly with local partners to identify barriers and establish goals for accessibility. By supporting Ohio's public and private entities to be accessible and inclusive, Ohio can lead the way in fostering a sense of community and belonging that strengthens the state for all its citizens.

Supports for Disabilities Services Partners

Governor DeWine and Lt. Governor Husted's proposed budget provides continued support for OOD's long-standing partners, the independent living and sight centers. In addition, this budget

increases the investment in the Community Centers for the Deaf, allowing for expanded services to Ohioans who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Penalty Enhancement for Hate Crimes Against Individuals with Disabilities

Governor DeWine and Lt. Governor Husted's proposed budget includes adding an enhanced penalty for hate crimes committed against individuals with disabilities who are targeted because of their disability. Ohio is one of only 14 states that does not offer this protection for victims against certain crimes motivated by disability status.

Conclusion

For more than 50 years, OOD has assisted individuals with disabilities in obtaining employment and independence. Because of Governor DeWine and Lt. Governor Husted's vision for disability inclusion, Ohio is recognized nationally for its innovation and being a model employer of individuals with disabilities.

Governor DeWine and Lt. Governor Husted's proposed budget represents a transformational investment that will provide OOD with the maximum amount of federal grant dollars allocated to the state by the second year of the biennium to help Ohioans with disabilities get and keep a job. With a generous federal match of \$3.69 drawn down for every \$1.00 in state matching funds, OOD's Vocational Rehabilitation program will be fully matched for the first time in more than 15 years. Supporting individuals with disabilities to gain employment and fully participate in their communities strengthens Ohio's economy, reduces reliance on government benefits, and generates tax dollars.

People with disabilities are our co-workers, neighbors, customers, friends, family members, and constituents who want the same opportunities as everyone else. Governor DeWine and Lt. Governor Husted's proposed budget for OOD ensures that Ohioans with disabilities remain a priority by supporting them to reach their God-given potential.

Our focus and commitment to our mission remain steadfast and OOD's demonstrated leadership has continued to achieve results. I respectfully ask for your support of these historic investments that this budget makes in Ohioans with disabilities and your local districts. I would be more than happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.