



## **Testimony on HB 33: The SFY 24/25 Operating Budget Senate Health Committee**

**Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio, and esteemed committee members,**

My name is Scott Marks and I am the Vice-President of the Ohio Provider Resource Association (OPRA). It is my honor to be with you today, representing the almost 200 OPRA members who support Ohioans with developmental disabilities and their families. I start by thanking you, Ohio's lawmakers, for your support of the developmental disability community and for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

In addition to serving as Vice-President, I am privileged to be the liaison to our community employment service providers, a contingency of over 50 OPRA members. These members are committed to helping Ohioans with developmental disabilities find and retain jobs in their communities through services funded and coordinated by Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities, OOD. I am here today to express our support for the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and OOD Director Miller and passed by the House in HB33.

Since 2012, Ohio has been an Employment First state, meaning services for adults with developmental disabilities should focus on supporting people to find and keep jobs. Additionally, on the first day of his first term, Governor DeWine declared Ohio a model state for employment for people with disabilities. While Ohio has made great progress in achieving both goals, there is still so much work to be done. Our members have been on the front lines of this work, providing skill-building, job coaching and job placement services to Ohioans with the most significant barriers to employment. OPRA is extremely proud of the work our members have done, in partnership with OOD, to help Ohioans with developmental disabilities achieve competitive employment and believe the budget amplifies the work our members do everyday.

It takes a creative, qualified and highly trained professional to provide job seeking and coaching services. Like many other positions throughout Ohio, job coaches, job developers and other employment professionals are in short supply. As the direct support workforce crisis impacts so many sectors of the disability service field, the employment services sector has not been unscathed. The current employment landscape presents an enormous opportunity for job seekers with disabilities to find good jobs, yet without the support needed to be successful on the job, this opportunity is wasted every day. As our system continues to search for solutions to the workforce crisis, community employment provides a vital opportunity for independence and autonomy for Ohioans with disabilities, opening up capacity for other critical support needs.

As the challenges and pressures of the past few years mounted, OOD worked closely with us and our members to make adjustments to their fee schedule and policies to better ensure access and capacity for employment services. We also worked closely with OOD to temporarily adjust credentialing requirements, expanding the capacity for supported employment job placement services for job seekers with the most significant developmental disabilities across the state. We are deeply appreciative of these efforts and OOD's partnership in implementing these changes, but without additional investment and resources put into vocational rehabilitation services, the heart of the crisis in employment services remains unaddressed. The budget initiatives as proposed by Governor DeWine and passed through HB 33 give us a platform to address this crisis and ensure our members recruit and retain the job coaches and job developers necessary to capitalize on the historic opportunity the current labor market presents for workers with disabilities.

With the additional resources proposed, Ohio maximizes its grant with the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), drawing down federal match dollars that go directly into supporting employment for Ohioans with disabilities. This funding bolsters pre-employment transition services to high school students looking for that next step in life and internship and apprenticeships for adults with disabilities looking to hone their skills in their chosen industry. It allows our members to continue providing services that help people build skills, discover their strengths, and connect with their communities through work. This budget helps us start to reverse course from the past few years and make work an achievable goal for Ohioans with developmental disabilities.

Again, we deeply appreciate the committee's support of services for Ohioans with developmental disabilities. We look forward to working with you throughout this budget process and hope to be a resource in any matters concerning disability services. We are grateful and proud of our partnership with OOD and the work we get to do together, supporting Ohioans with disabilities to unlock their full potential in the career of their choosing. I welcome any questions from the committee at this time.

Respectfully Submitted,

Scott Marks

Vice-President  
Ohio Provider Resource Association