

Mary Nix
Testimony on HB 33
Supporting the DD Workforce

My younger sister was diagnosed with a developmental disability 56 years ago. The doctors said to put her in an institution. Institutions were pretty horrendous in those days and we kept her home. She lived with our parents her entire life till they passed, and then, my husband and I moved in with her. As she and I have aged, caring for her became increasingly difficult for me physically.

In 2020, her health declined and she needed hospitalization and then rehab in a nursing home. From there, she moved into her new home at Welcome House. She is quite happy there and is well cared for. Her Direct Support Professionals do a great job, but there is a major Direct Service Professional shortage. This is a legislative issue as the funds come from the State Medicaid Budget which is where the pay structure is decided. I visited Columbus to testify before the House Finance Committee and ask them to increase the Budget for this pay increase.

50 years ago, our mom and others advocated for those with Intellectual Developmental Disabilities, traveling to the Statehouse often. They helped pass laws enabling these individuals to attend school, to be treated with dignity, giving individuals with disabilities rights that many of us take for granted. 50 years ago my mom was a cofounder of Welcome House.

Raising pay to Direct Service Professionals enables the advocacy work started 50 years ago to continue. Without the proper pay for staff, we will increasingly lose more direct support professionals. Without direct support professionals, organizations will not be able to provide care. What happens then?

Working in the IDD field is rewarding, but it is not a volunteer job. It needs to adequately adjust to today's economy to keep and attract new Direct Service Professionals.

This shortage affects families just like mine all across the state with individuals on waiting lists.