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Testimony on SFY 24/25 Operating Budget Senate Medicaid Committee

Chairman Romanchuk, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Ingram, and esteemed committee members,

I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Janelle Wehrman and I am the CEO of Mercer Residential Services, Inc., and we are located in Mercer, Auglaize and Van Wert Counties. Mercer Residential Services, Inc. provides services in an intermediate care facility for individuals with intellectual disabilities, as well as residential, day vocational and respite services through the home and community-based waiver program administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). Our team of 58 employees are proud to provide essential services to 58 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities

I am very supportive of the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Hauck for DODD and very appreciative of the additional investments adopted by the House of Representatives in House Bill 33.

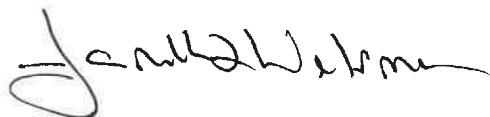
Mercer Residential Services, Inc., is a non-profit agency providing services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in rural counties. Our biggest challenge is our workforce. We simply do not have enough Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) to cover the services that our individuals require. Our DSPs are challenged with being able to have food on their table and gas in their vehicles so they can get to work. Some of our DSPs work more than one job so they can meet their budget needs for their home. We need to ensure our DSPs are adequately compensated at a competitive rate to ensure they can support their families and the individuals they care for each day. We need to strengthen our workforce so that we can continue to provide quality care and services to the most vulnerable individuals which are those who have an intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Individuals with developmental disabilities need agencies like Mercer Residential Services, Inc. We provide all day-to-day care that these individuals require when families can no longer provide care at home care. This allows the individuals the opportunity to live a fulfilling life. Whether the individuals need us to help take them to the bank, grocery shopping, essential medical appointments or help feed and dress them, etc. that is what we do. We have day programs where we teach individuals new skills so they can obtain employment if that is their goal. If employment is not their goal and they have other skills, they would like to learn we will provide that training. We take the individuals out into the community to places where they want to go. Transportation can be a great challenge for the

individuals due to their disabilities, so our agency provides transportation using clean, safe, wheelchair accessible vans.

House Bill 33 as passed by the House is a great foundation to reinforce and rebuild the services provided by Mercer Residential Services, Inc. We encourage this committee to support the House's version of H.B. 33 as it pertains to DODD appropriations. Further, we encourage the Senate to invest additional dollars into these vital services to raise direct support professional wages to at least an average of \$20.64. This investment will help us recruit and retain the workforce needed to continue to provide our quality services.

With your leadership, together we can ensure these services are available to the Ohioans that so greatly need them! Thank you again, for the opportunity and privilege to bring my concerns before you and if I can ever be of any help in this process, please let me know.



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