



**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 Jessica Toivonen and I am the Executive Director of Blossom Hill, Inc., and we are located in **Westlake, North Royalton, and Parma, all in Cuyahoga County. Blossom Hill, Inc. is an Intermediate Care Facility (ICF) that provides residential services, as well as supported living and respite services through home and community-based waiver programs administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD).** Our team of about 100 employees are proud to provide essential services to nearly 80 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.**

While this provides a great foundation for rebuilding our services, staffing remains one of our biggest challenges and within the IDD industry at large. While staffing shortages are not unique to our industry, what is unique is the extreme impact that it has on the people we serve and the people who we have the *potential* to serve. Despite advances in technology, we will always require in-person, hands-on care for our individuals. The bottom line is that **our staff keep people alive**, and the dire impact of proper reimbursement cannot be understated.

Currently this year, we are down by 15 staff members from the same time last year. That translates to 840 open hours per week, which is a significant gap for the 36 individuals we care for in our ICF group homes. **Hiring and retaining Direct Support Professionals continues to be our biggest challenge** as we are only able to offer \$14/hour for a Direct Support Professional while big box stores like Target and Amazon pay \$15+/hour. To keep our individuals safe and provide our standard excellent level of care for another 55 years, we will be forced to make very hard decisions about the number of individuals we will be able to serve.

As we indicated above, our services are critical for individuals with disabilities to reach their potential and live a fulfilling life, to which every person should be entitled to. Right now, we are stretching our staff to the limit; our staff who provide wonderful, personalized care for individuals who are extremely medically fragile can only work so many hours in a day until it becomes unsafe. The families of the individuals that we take care of rely on us because many of them are unable to take care of their loved one in their own home for a variety of reasons: they are older and cannot physically provide care, their loved ones have a high medical need that requires nursing assistance, or they have fulltime jobs and cannot be home as a fulltime caregiver to provide this care.

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House Bill 33 as passed by the House is a great foundation to reinforce and rebuild the services provided by Blossom Hill, 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.**

*Jessica M. Toivonen*

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