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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 provide this written testimony in support of budget initiatives included in House Bill 33.

My name is Belinda Glavic Grassi and I am the Chief Finance Officer of Help Foundation, Inc. Our agency is headquartered in Euclid Ohio. Help Foundation serves individuals with developmental disabilities at 17 residential locations, 4 adult day program locations, 4 vocational training locations, and numerous on-site community based job training locations - all throughout primarily Cuyahoga and Summit Counties. We also provide transportation services to those enrolled at all of our site locations.

Our services are provided under waiver authorizations approved and administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). Our team of 200 full-time and part-time employees are proud to provide essential services to over 320 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities each and every day at our residential homes, adult day programs and vocational training locations.

As the Chief Finance Officer of the organization, I can tell you with certainty that our entire team is 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.

Since I have worked at Help Foundation beginning in April of 2019:

- Economic inflation in the general marketplace has increased by 18% according to the CPI Inflation Calculator available for all on the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics website.
- The average cost of wages paid by Help Foundation has increased by 37.7%.
- Wages and benefits reflect 74% of overall Agency revenue.
- The cost of benefits and payroll taxes is annually consistent at approximately 16% of wages.
- Interest rates have risen by over 4% which affects our ability to borrow short term funds, lease new vehicles, or refinance facility mortgages.
- Investment and endowment funds have fallen in value to below cost despite the best efforts of our endowment advisors.
- The cost of daily living has increased dramatically, and our organization feels the effect of that increase each time we fill up our vans at the gas station, take our residents grocery shopping, or pay the heat and electric bills at our residence locations and day/vocational locations.

- The COVID health crisis curtailed our ability to provide services across many of our programs

During this same 4 year period, our Residential Medicaid Waiver Reimbursement Rates have risen from \$5.15 per service unit to \$6.22 per service unit. This \$1.07 per unit increase reflects an overall increase of 20.8%. When converted to hourly billing rates, we have moved from \$20.60 per hour to \$24.88 per hour.

Our agency is extremely grateful for the increases budgeted in years past.

However, it should be noted that we continue to struggle to pay living wages to our most valued employees – our direct care professionals who interact most closely on a daily basis with those we serve.

With wages being directly tied to hourly revenue, and consistent with our data that indicates we pay 74% of our revenue back to employees via wages and benefits, it can be extrapolated that we currently pay – on average - \$18.41 per hour to include both wages and taxes/benefits. We know per our financial data over time that our payroll taxes and benefits cost approximately 16% of that total, thus we can deduce that our average employee wage is only 84% of that \$18.41 – or \$15.46 per hour.

This low average wage has greatly affected our ability to attract and retain quality staff. Our overtime costs continue to remain high, our turnover continues to remain problematic, and the cost of recruiting and training new staff continually eats away at budget dollars that could be more effectively used elsewhere in our organization.

As you know, the importance of the services we provide to individuals cannot be over-stated. Helping individuals reach their full potential and allowing them to be productive and welcome members of their community is the direct result of the dollars provided through Waiver services. The individuals we serve are loved and valued by our staff, our Agency, their families and our communities we live in.

Help us Help them.

House Bill 33 as passed by the House is a great foundation to reinforce and continue building our mission here at Help Foundation. 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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