

**Testimony on SFY 24/25 Operating Budget
Senate Medicaid Committee**

May 4, 2023

Chairman Romanchuk, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Ingram, and esteemed committee members, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony today.

My name is Anthony Kukura, and I am the Strategy Associate of Programs at Koinonia Homes. Koinonia Homes is a nonprofit organization that provides whole person, community based, care to IDD (intellectual and developmental disabilities) individuals. Koinonia has a wide-reaching presence throughout northeast Ohio. We operate over 60 homes throughout the region, allowing the individuals we serve to continue to reside in and be contributing members of the communities they know as home. This model of care is utilized throughout the state of Ohio, and it is a more sustainable and economical alternative to other methods of long-term care. This model has allowed IDD Ohioans to live longer and healthier lives. Our team of over 450 employees are proud to provide essential services to over 350 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Many factors have caused our industry to enter a crisis level position, however COVID-19 further exacerbated a funding problem that has plagued our industry for many years. To remain a competitive employer, Koinonia has had to raise its rates of pay beyond the rate of reimbursement we receive from Medicaid.

Working in this industry is a calling, and one that everyone who works at this organization feels personally. Adults with IDD deserve to live in and be a part of their own communities. They deserve a life of dignity and respect. The services we provide throughout the northeast Ohio community are essential, and in fact our model is more economically responsible than alternatives such as nursing homes and large institutions. My mother was a special education teacher for many years. I grew up understanding that everyone, regardless of disability, deserves a chance to be a contributing member of their community. When the opportunity presented itself to work at an organization like Koinonia, I knew it was where I was meant to end up. Organizations like Koinonia have greatly enhanced the lives of the IDD population in Ohio, and because of the support we provide, IDD adults are living longer and healthier lives.

I am very supportive of the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Hauck for DODD and I am very appreciative of the additional investments adopted by the House of Representatives in House Bill 33. 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 an average of \$20. This investment will help us recruit and retain the workforce needed to continue to provide our quality services. We're confident this investment will enable us to reduce turnover, increase retention, and reduce hours dedicated to training and recruitment. It cannot be overstated how impactful continuity of care is for the individuals we serve. Institutional knowledge can only be built through a stable and revitalized workforce. We currently have open beds across our organization due to our staffing crisis as we cannot meet safe staffing ratios

required by the state. Increasing the direct support professional wages will ensure we provide optimal care to our individuals and be a stable resource to the communities we serve, and the county board.

With your leadership, together we can ensure these services are available to the Ohioans that so greatly need them. Thank you for the opportunity and privilege to bring my concerns before you today.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anthony B. Kukura". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "A".

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