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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,

Richland Newhope Industries, Inc. (RNI, Inc.) Management Team and Executive Director, Amanda South, want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

RNI, Inc, has our main office located in Mansfield, Ohio with a service area of ten (10) counties which include: Richland, Crawford, Ashland, Wayne, Morrow, Marion, Huron, Knox, Seneca, and Wyandot. We are an organization that provides homemaker/personal care, transportation, day, and employment services through the home and community-based waiver program administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). Our team of one hundred and thirty (130) employees feel privileged to be entrusted to provide quality essential services to a total of four hundred and forty-two (442) 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.

The DD provider community and RNI, Inc. as a member of that community has experienced a significant shortage of workers since the start of the COVID pandemic in early 2020. In 2019 prior to the pandemic, RNI, Inc., received over 150 applicants for our limited vacant DSP positions. In 2022, RNI, Inc. had only 44 applicants for our numerous vacant DSP positions. With the increased competition for workers within our service areas, RNI, Inc. has not maintained competitive wages due to the reimbursement rates available through the waiver program administered by DODD. The reimbursement rate for the waiver program administered by DODD has not had a comprehensive adjustment since 2008. RNI, Inc. is dedicated to providing quality essential services to Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities, but without an accompanying competitive reimbursement rate the ability to do so has been threatened as we are unable to offer competitive wages to our workforce. Without competitive wages for our workforce RNI, Inc. has been unable to recruit and maintain a robust workforce to deliver and expand these essential services to Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Ohioans with intellectual and development disabilities rely on the services RNI, Inc. provides for their families to work themselves or for aging caregivers to be assured that their loved ones are cared for within their communities. The direct support professionals (DSPs), provide daily services that facilitate the learning and maintenance of skills including job readiness, assistance with personal care, administration of medication, administration of vital tube feedings, integration into their communities, assistance with securing community employment, mastering job tasks in community employment, maintaining community employment, transportation to and from their homes to their greater communities and employment. Without the essential services provided by RNI, Inc. and other waiver service providers, Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities would be reliant on their families or more costly facilities such as nursing home or developmental centers to meet their basic needs and ensure health, safety, and skill development.

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

Sincerely,



Amanda South, Executive Director

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