

**Testimony Before the Ohio Senate Medicaid Committee**

**House Bill 33**

**Debbie Jenkins**

**May 4, 2023**

Chair Romanchuk, Vice-Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the committee, my name is Debbie Jenkins and I am here representing the Ohio Health Care Association. Our association represents providers of long-term services and supports including assisted living communities, home care and hospice agencies, skilled nursing facilities, and providers who serve people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today regarding House Bill 33 and specifically the section of the budget for the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). OHCA is grateful to Governor DeWine and Director Kim Hauck for recognizing the direct care workforce crisis in the executive version of the budget. We are also extremely appreciative of the House of Representative's additional investment in DD services.

Ohio's Developmental Disabilities (DD) system has historically struggled to recruit and retain a compassionate and quality workforce due to low Medicaid reimbursement rates. DD services are solely reliant on Medicaid funding, which currently is based on an average direct support professional (DSP) wage of around \$13-14 per hour. As you've heard from others providing testimony, this is just not enough to offer competitive wages, especially considering the tough demands of the position.

DSPs provide a variety of services and supports to the people they serve, based on that person's unique needs. Some of their responsibilities you are probably aware of, such as personal care and light housekeeping. However, there are probably some other parts of the job that you may not think about when you picture what a DSP does in a day. Most DSPs are certified by DODD to administer medications or perform delegated nursing tasks. DSPs provide transportation and assist people in accessing

their communities. They coordinate health care visits, assist with maintaining benefits and manage finances. DSPs provide behavior supports and interventions, which may put the DSP in a harmful position. DSPs help people communicate their wants and needs, assist people in researching careers and help the people they serve to obtain and maintain employment. They provide companionship and daily guidance for the people served from birth to death – facing all situations a person encounters during their life. A DSP doesn't just perform tasks for the people they support, DSPs help people keep the skills they have and even learn new skills to increase their independence.

As you can see, the demands we place on our direct support professionals are extremely broad and vary based on the person or people they are working with that day. Additionally, many settings only have one DSP supporting multiple people, without other staff or supervision on site, which adds to the pressure of the position.

Now, remember, the average starting wage for this position is \$12.10. The average reimbursement for this position is around \$13-14 depending on the type of service. It's not hard to understand why people are not applying for these positions and why current staff are leaving for higher paying jobs with less responsibility.

Employee surveys, exit interviews, state-wide DSP surveys, and DODD-supported forums have all identified the rate of compensation as the number one barrier to hiring and retaining staff who otherwise have a passion for supporting people with developmental disabilities.

However, we have had a few agencies who have utilized one-time funds to increase wages. We have a member in Medina County who increased their starting wage, starting – not average wage, to \$18 an hour. The provider stated, "Since increasing our wages we have been successful with recruiting new people, many coming from referrals from current staff who are happy with their employment." However, increasing starting wages also requires an increase in wages for long-term employees causing the provider's average DSP wage to be right around \$20 an hour.

This provider and the few others across the state who raised wages in order to compete for staff have taken a leap of faith. If Medicaid reimbursement rates are not increased, these organizations won't be able to sustain the wages and will have to make tough decisions to reduce services or potentially close their doors. Several of our members have estimated that without increased funding, their organization will only be financially viable for 18-24 months. That's within the timeframe of this biennial budget.

Stabilizing Ohio's DD system of support will require a major investment in Medicaid service reimbursement to allow providers to compete, recruit and retain quality Direct Support Professionals. This has been proven by the handful of providers who have taken the leap of faith and raised wages. DODD has even increased their starting wage to \$20 an hour for DSPs at the developmental centers.

We know some of you may have concerns with ensuring funding appropriated for services actually goes to increasing DSP wages. That same concern was raised during the state fiscal year 2020-2021 budget when the legislature provided an increase for homemaker/personal care. Our associations worked with the Department of Developmental Disabilities to create a DSP Compensation Survey. In 2020, a sample of agencies providing residential waiver services was selected to complete the survey. In 2021, all agencies providing homemaker/personal care were required to complete the survey. DODD published the [2021 DSP Compensation Survey Summary](#) on its website. The survey showed that in 2021, the average regular wage was \$13.72 an hour which was higher than the average wage in the reimbursement formula - \$13.23 in 2021. This survey can easily be expanded to include adult day and employment services. Additionally, the ICF program requires annual cost reports to be submitted that include salary, employee-related expenses, and the number of hours worked. The DD system has the tools available to continue to ensure that DSPs are receiving the wages supported by Medicaid funding.

People with developmental disabilities rely on the services and supports they receive from their direct support professionals. When staff are not available, the impact on their lives and the lives of their family is tremendous and often life-threatening.

People should be able to receive support in the setting of their choice, which is why DSPs in all services should be compensated at a rate that reflects the challenging demands of the job and shows that the work they do is valued.

We know you have your work cut out for you in this budget process, but we respectfully ask that you not only maintain the funding included in the House budget, but ensure Medicaid reimbursement rates support the \$20 an hour average wage.

Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.