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Testimony on SFY 24/25 Operating Budget 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 Ashley Brocius and I am the CEO of RT Industries. We are located in Troy Ohio, serving Miami, Shelby, Darke, Auglaize & Montgomery Counties presently. We are an organization that provides day and employment services through the home and community-based waiver program administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). Our team of thirty (30) Direct Support Professionals (DSP) are proud to provide essential services to over one hundred fifty (150) Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities each month.

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.

We empower people with developmental disabilities to gain and maintain employment in the workforce. We give people the opportunity to be financially independent. We promote inclusion and friendship in our communities. We teach employers how to work effectively with their new employees. We promote self-advocacy and independent living skills. For too long, people with developmental disabilities have been viewed as less than but the reality is, each person brings their own worth to this great state of Ohio. We are a resource for the workforce crisis. We allow stability for parents. We support our community through volunteer opportunities. Above all, we support the people we serve live meaningful lives in the community. Inclusion in the community is a powerful aspect of a meaningful life, and RT is privileged to share that experience with the people we serve.

Why should you invest in our services?

RT provides supports to people with unique and/or complex needs that would otherwise not receive services. We strive to provide the same opportunities to all people receiving our services regardless of the obstacles at hand. RT provides more than just the "extras" for someone's life. We provide the CORE for a quality life through Day Services and Employment Supports. Our Day Services provides stability and consistency for people with developmental disabilities. Many people we serve today transitioned from Riverside school in Miami County to our organization since our inception. We are a safe place. The detriment that persons served, parents and families would face if RT did not exist would be life altering. To many of the people we serve, RT is home and a critical part of their daily routine and well-being.

*Helping people achieve personal success by developing skills
to confidently work, interact and thrive in the community.*

~ Safety ~ Collaboration ~ Camaraderie ~ Growth ~ Integrity ~ Excellence ~ Innovation ~



RT has also been a staple in the Troy community since 1974, as a sheltered workshop to support adults with developmental disabilities gain the necessary employment skills to enter the workforce. Not only have we been a staple for the people we serve but local businesses too. Our relationships continue to grow and flourish, especially now that the workforce crisis has impacted majority of the local businesses today. I never thought I'd see the day, but RT has a waiting list that continues to grow of local businesses who want to partner with us, but we do not have the manpower of DSPs to move forward. To clarify, these businesses have reached out to us to partner.

We currently assist seventy-seven (77) people through our business partnerships with on-the-job supports who are employed in the community with our top four (4) longest tenured persons served being employed for over 20 years. On average, the longevity of a person with a developmental disability being employed at a business is 5.83 years with RT. The four (4) highest paid persons receiving our Employment Services are: \$17.60, \$15.60, \$15.00, and \$15.00 per hour. While I am proud to share those wages with you, I am also discouraged and saddened that RT's DSPs that support them have a starting wage of \$13.00 per hour.

Today we support school-aged students through aging adults to gain career exposure, provide on-the-job supports, promote community inclusion, develop independent living skills and more through community living. Our mission, helping people achieve personal success by developing skills to confidently work, interact and thrive in the community focuses on individual goals and what it means to be part of the greater community.

Attached to my testimony is a separate page about the impact our services have made to families and persons served in our community.

Everywhere you go, businesses are short-staffed, closing early due to staffing shortages and manufacturers of goods are behind on getting products out the door. RT is no different. To put the impact of the workforce shortage and the impact to families into perspective, RT is operating at 57.2% less DSPs providing these essential supports and 44.3% less persons served than pre-pandemic as a direct correlation to the workforce crisis. Our waiting list consists of many people with complex needs and families who we are unable to transport from out of county. The people on our waiting list are stuck at home until we can provide their needed supports with adequate staffing. These families do not have respite.

We do not have the option to close early due to staffing shortages without additional consequences to our communities, their families, and the people we serve. If businesses, including RT went under, the workforce crisis would increase exponentially. Here are just a few reasons why:

1. People with developmental disabilities and their families will lose life-saving support.
2. No longer a stable and consistent environment available.
3. Parents and/or siblings forced to leave the workforce at a rapid rate to care for their child(ren)/siblings causing lack of income and reliance on government assistance.
4. Increased pressure on the family structure itself.
5. Local communities are deprived of the labor and talents of otherwise willing and able working people.
6. Businesses struggle employing and maintaining employment of people with developmental disabilities.

7. Residential providers need to find additional staff to cover daytime hours in an already difficult workforce crisis.

Employers across Ohio are offering massive incentives such as sign on bonuses, attendance bonuses, and increased starting wages to encourage people to work there. DD providers, including RT cannot compete with that due to our current funding. We are losing experienced DSPs at a rapid rate of 51.6% because they need a wage that adequately supports the needs of their families. These employees did not want to leave our business but were forced to make tough decisions to walk away from the work they are passionate about. This has been a struggle for RT and the people receiving our services. Not having the consistency of the same DSP affects the quality of our service because you spend a lot of time getting to know a person and how to assist them just for that DSP to leave the organization.

On average, 46.2% of applicants have declined our employment offers due to our low wages and much less responsibility in other career paths. In today's job market, we are seeing that applicants want to negotiate higher starting wages when offered a position however due to our stagnate funding, we have strict parameters on what we are able to offer.

RT was thriving and making a huge impact on the lives of people with developmental disabilities prior to the pandemic. We were on the path to enrich people's lives through community life. Regression has caused a disruption in the varying levels of needs we support however the needs for these services have not changed. The harsh reality is that companies like RT, are not sustainable without these necessary budget increases.

The Governor's proposed budget initiatives, guided by the leadership of Director Hauck, is a great foundation to reinforce and rebuild the services provided by RT Industries. **We encourage this subcommittee to approve the Governor's budget proposal for DODD and 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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Meet Alicia Shelley:

She is forty-nine (49) years of age with limited mobility and requires total assistance in all aspects of her life to include personal care, preparing meals, medication administration with life-saving measures, and transportation. Her sister, Emily Parrott, a nurse in the medical field, which is a vital career, was forced to quit her job to ensure quality care for her sister by moving her into her family home due to the workforce crisis. We have continued our supports through this family crisis by meeting Emily and Alicia at a local park in Miami County to transport her to and from RT each day. To Alicia, RT is her thing! It is for her and about her. Alicia has autonomy while at RT. She has created longstanding friendships and would otherwise not have the opportunities she does presently.



Meet Britton Hoskins:

(Testimony provided by parents, Joe & Mary Hoskins)

Life's many twists and turns can show up unexpectedly and as is true of all surprises, you don't see them coming. Indeed, Britton our soon to be 25-year-old son with profound autism, keeps us guessing all the time. For his well-being and ours, we have currently managed to find a life balance where he can have the space, he needs to strive to be all he can be.

An important part of that balance is provided by day services Britton receives at RT Industries in Troy, Ohio. For 6 years and counting, RT buses Britton to and from their facility each weekday and RT's talented and devoted Staff keep him engaged in varied daily activities that are too numerous to count. Britton is a creature of habit and it is critical for him to maintain a routine that he (and our family) can count on. RT does not disappoint, and Britton thoroughly enjoys the interactions and life training he receives. We are firm believers that RT Industries has played a big part in the person Britton is becoming. We look forward to many more years with RT by Britton's side!!

