

**Testimony on SF 24/25 Operating Budget
House Bill 33 Sub-Bill
Senate Medicaid Committee
May 4, 2023**

Chairperson Romanchuk, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of this Committee,

I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Dan Hinkle and I have a daughter (Taylor) with a disability. We live in Troy, Ohio in Miami County.

I would like to share my family's story and express my support of the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine, Director Hauck of the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD), and Director Miller of Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (ODD).

I feel that I am somewhat uniquely qualified to speak on this topic as I am not only a parent of a child with a disability, but also a former Member of the Board at RT Industries from 2012 through 2019, (serving my last year as Board President) and a businessperson who has had responsibility for hiring and retention of employees throughout my career. I understand the importance of being competitive in the marketplace when trying to hire and keep the best employees.

My daughter Taylor is 30 years old and was diagnosed with Williams Syndrome at age 5. Our world was turned upside down and we had no idea the journey we were about to embark on. Fortunately for our family, we lived in a community where support and services for people with disabilities was available and we were directed to Riverside of Miami County Board of Developmental Disabilities immediately. This organization was incredible, and Taylor met many new friends, got to be involved in various group activities (the Zoo, sporting events, movies, dinner, etc.) and worked with Service and Support Administrators (SSA) who became like family to us.

While our children were still in school, my job took us to Minnesota and I assumed that the services Taylor had come to love and my wife and I had depended on, would be in Minnesota and I was wrong. We did research, we talked to school officials, we reached out to our contacts in Ohio and what we found out was that the services were very minimal in Minnesota at that time, and we had lost a support network that was unbelievably valuable to us. This ended up being a short stay in Minnesota as we moved back in 11 months. Even though we had options to go anywhere in the country, I knew we were going back to Troy, Ohio. I had a similar experience when I was recruited to another company based out of Florida. They wanted me to work out of the corporate offices in New Port Richie, Florida, but I was more aware of what was necessary for Taylor for us to make that move. After extensive research including that of our Human Resources Department, it became clear to me that what was best for Taylor and our family was to stay in Ohio. These services may look like a line item in a budget to some people who may not fully understand the benefits to those served and the community, but I can speak personally to the fact that it is an **investment** in recruiting and keeping people in Ohio. We live here, in large part because of these services.

Taylor currently works as the receptionist at RT Industries. After high school, Taylor participated in two separate job training programs before she joined RT in their sheltered workshop. This gave Taylor a sense of purpose and, although she could have stayed home, we wanted her to be an active member of the community and go to work. Taylor has a wonderful personality and those who meet her and become friends are forever changed for the better. As she was working in the shop, she was asked if she would like to cover breaks for the receptionist, which she happily did. When the receptionist opportunity became available, Taylor applied and got the job. Taylor has now been with RT for over 10 years. We feel extremely fortunate because it is a “safe place” in the community for Taylor to work.

I had the pleasure of serving on the Board and got to see some of the struggles the organization has gone through, over the years and there have been many, but the shortage of Direct Support Professionals (DSP), is one that concerns me the most.

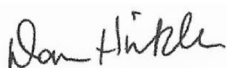
Although I have shared a lot about Taylor and our family's situation, I am here to highlight what I see as a potential crisis if the wages of the Direct Support Professionals (DSP) do not get more in line with the current market. This is a role where we are entrusting the lives of our loved ones with disabilities and from my understanding, the starting wage at our facility is \$13.00, which equates to just over \$27,000 annually. You can make more than that in an entry-level fast-food role and for comparison purposes, I currently hire customer service representatives starting at \$45,000. As the wage gap widens, we will lose caring and talented individuals who have a passion for helping others. People know they are not going to get rich in this field, but they should expect a competitive wage for the incredibly important work they do.

We are fortunate that Taylor does not need all the resources that others in our community do. I see so many others that are dependent on these services and it is heartbreaking to see them minimized or even go away.

The Governor's proposed budget initiatives, guided by the leadership of Director Hauck and the additional funding included in by the House, are a great foundation to reinforce and rebuild the services provided by RT Industries. We encourage this committee to build on these investments with 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.

Thank you again for the opportunity and privilege to express my concerns and share our "story" of the importance of these programs and providing a competitive wage for those amazing people who choose a path in support of individuals with disabilities, they have helped my family more than I can express in the short time I have the opportunity to speak.

Sincerely,



Dan Hinkle

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