



House Bill 33 - Proponent Testimony

Senate Medicaid Committee

Michael Denlinger

May 4, 2023

Chairman Romanchuk, Vice-Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Medicaid Committee, my name is Michael Denlinger and I am the Chairman of the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council, which I will refer to as the DD Council. The DD Council is created by federal law and is charged with developing a 5-Year Plan on Developmental Disabilities. The 32 members of our Council include adults with developmental disabilities, family members and guardians of children and adults with developmental disabilities, representatives from state agencies, representatives from Ohio's two University Centers of Excellence on Developmental Disabilities, a representative from the state's Protection and Advocacy Agency, and local for-profit and non-profit organizations that serve the needs of people with developmental disabilities. In a nutshell, our Council represents the entirety of the Developmental Disabilities system in Ohio.

The Council supports any effort to improve the working conditions and pay for individuals who provide services and supports to people with developmental disabilities and other Ohioans with disabilities. Through our own efforts, we have supported grants to provide training, technical assistance, education, recruitment and retention of Direct Support Professionals (DSPs). In our most recent 5-Year Plan on Developmental Disabilities, the Council has funded a project called the DSP White Paper in Action grant. Through this grant, the Ohio Alliance of Direct Support Professionals are working to expand high school programs to all students with an interest in working in the intellectual and developmental disabilities field, to grow marketing and educational materials for the general public who may be interested in entering the field of developmental disabilities as a DSP, and continues to provide training and technical assistance to current DSPs.

I was very pleased to hear the House of Representatives proposed increases for Direct Support Professional wages above and beyond the increase proposed by Governor DeWine, to reach a minimum of \$18 per hour by the end of the next biennium. The Ohio DD Council supports this effort. For the members of the DD Council who need a DSP in order to serve on the Council, our federal law allows for the payment of their DSP's wages while attending Council meetings. In 2022, the Council voted to increase the wage for DSP's supporting our members to \$20 per hour.

I would also like to express support for language contained in this budget to require at least one individual who is eligible for county board of developmental disabilities services to be appointed to each county board of developmental disabilities. Again, the Council has supported a grant to support individuals with developmental disabilities to establish their own advocacy priority. The Advocacy Task Force, which was led by individuals with developmental disabilities, identified this subject as their number one priority. And while the state has had a law that provides for the appointment of one individual eligible for county board services, less than one-quarter of the 88 county boards of DD actually have a person with a developmental disability appointed to their board.

Moving to the third policy issue addressed by the as-introduced budget, I would like to express support for language contained in our statute that allows members of the DD Council to be counted towards a quorum and to vote without being physically present at our meetings. The Ohio DD Council has had some version of this authority since 2009, first as pilot programs, and later as a permanent law in 2014. We were one of the few pre-COVID organizations that were working on virtual public meetings. We have met with the Ohio News Media Association and discussed our proposed changes that have been included in House Bill 33 to eliminate geographic restrictions for participation and to remove from statute the requirement that every vote be held by a roll call vote. We plan to continue to hold meetings in a location open to the public and to continue to require at least 3 members of the Council to be in attendance.

Lastly, there are several other key items that have been included as part of this budget that we would like to express our support for, including:

- Continuing support for Employment First and Technology First.
- Support for universal changing stations in public areas in the state of Ohio (Universal Changing Stations were temporarily used in the Ohio Statehouse during the DD Awareness and Advocacy Day Kickoff on March 1st).
- Support for the Accessible Ohio program contained with the Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities Agency.
- Support for the Independent Living Supplement that provides \$1 Million for home modifications, ramps, and assistive technologies for people with disabilities living in the community.
- Support for the expansion of the Medicaid Buy-In Program for Workers with Disabilities to ensure that people with disabilities age 65 or older can continue working if they so choose.

On behalf of the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council, I thank you for your attention and would be happy to answer any questions you may have.