

**Testimony on SFY 24/25 Operating Budget  
Senate Medicaid Committee**

Chairman Romanchuk, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Ingram, and esteemed committee members,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak today. My name is Cynthia Hornish and I am here today with Koinonia Homes located in Independence Ohio in Cuyahoga County, serving several counties throughout Northeast Ohio to over 350 people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. I am also here as an advocate for my special needs brother, Sean.

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.

Part of my struggle is the fact that my brother lives 2 and a half hours away from me and I rely on the system to fulfil his needs from a far. I recognize the positive effects these types of services can have with proper funding. However, I have also seen firsthand the constraints that are placed on the staff and individuals impacted when funding falls short. The current funding doesn't balance the effectiveness that these services could deliver. The budget proposal for DODD and the investment of additional dollars is vital to combat the shortage of employees by providing a fair wage, retaining staff, and providing quality stable care for those that need it most. Current staff levels are unable to deliver the quality of care needed to meet even the basic day to day needs. As an example, my brother Sean has a state ID that has been expired for 2 years. It's only been recently that I have had to gain assurance that it will be taken care of due to him traveling with us. The staff are tired and overworked from what I have observed in my situation with my brother Sean. I have encountered many instances where my brother has either had to cancel plans or alter plans due to staffing shortages or rearrangements in staffing schedules due to limited availability or call offs. I find it challenging sometimes for him to even get his haircut. Many times, when he is visiting me, I end up taking him and getting it cut extra short, not knowing when his next appointment will be.

Limited staffing also creates an unhealthy environment for the individuals and staff to coexist in. Simple activities like going outside in the yard, cooking, playing games, going out in the community and other basic needs are challenging to make happen. It is demotivating and frustrating for the staff and individuals. It can lead to an unhealthy mental state for all involved. I say this knowing that those who are putting in the work with my brother are doing so with best intentions.

With higher wages, retaining staff will allow relationships to remain consistent and flourish and allow staff to anticipate the needs easier with their individuals. There will be less stress or tension not having to start over in building new relationships with new staff, or adapting to new routines, personalities, or rules where applicable. These examples that I have mentioned are why I believe this additional funding is needed and necessary. Selfishly, I want my brother to experience as normal of a life as possible and by approving this funding, his situation and others experiencing similar situations can be vastly improved.

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 an average of \$20. This investment will help us recruit and retain the workforce needed to continue to provide our quality services.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today and please let me know if you need anything else.

*Cynthia Hornish*

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