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Interested Party Testimony for House Bill 33

Thank you, Chairman Romanchuk, Vice Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Medicaid Committee, for the opportunity to testify today on two House Amendments to HB33 Sec. 5123.68 to 5123.685 Supported Decision Making, and County Board DD Membership R. C. 5125.022. These added Amendments to the Governor's version of HB 33 will further disempower people with DD.

My name is Renee Wood. I am a member of multiple organizations in Ohio and currently Chair both the Ability Center of Greater Toledo Board of Trustees, as well as the Ohio Olmstead Task Force (OOTF). I am here specifically to speak on behalf both of these organizations today. Both the Ability Center and OOTF promote independence, consumer control on their Board and staff, as well community integration in all aspects of life. These 2 amendments only further the belief that people with disabilities, especially those of us with Developmental Disabilities (as if we're a different breed of "disabled") are generally thought of as incompetent, unable to meet the requirements to be on our own county boards of DD, and officials need the assurance that someone is looking at our decisions, so we don't make the same mistakes as most non-disabled free Americans.

When the Governors' Bill contained a mandated seat for someone with DD to be appointed to the local County Board of DD, many of us were ecstatic that finally there's no way around giving us a seat at the table concerning our own services. We were always supposed to have a seat, but Commissioners got out of it with the "and/or" wording. The amended version of the House Bill basically does the same by allowing the commissioner to simply write a letter to the board president explaining why an eligible person for DD services could not be appointed so that seat can be filled by someone else.

In my opinion, as well as from my experience, unless we (people with DD), have elected officials in a captive audience like this, they don't associate with us as they do our parents. And why might that be? Hmm, they can relate to our non-disabled parents more than they can relate to someone who speaks differently, moves awkwardly and appears to be unfit for anything meaningful. As a person with 2 college degrees and who has held many distinguished positions in society, when I have approached an elected official at the appropriate time and space, they basically pat me on the head and dismiss me and move on to talk with a non-disabled person. This amended language alleviates the appointing authorities from the uncomfortable responsibility of talking to someone who looks and speaks differently than what they are accustomed to.

This loop-hole only keeps the "status quo" and doesn't force appointing authorities to run in a different circle, way outside their comfort zone, into the trenches of their constituents who speak disability and

navigate the world differently. I urge you to keep the Governors' language in requiring a seat on the county board with no loop-holes. The seat goes vacant until the commissioners do the work because there are plenty of us out here willing and as capable as our parents.

The Advocacy and Protective services In. (APSI) got an amendment into HB 33 centered around Supported Decision Making (SDM) only for the DD population, which is an issue in itself, but set that aside for now. APSI's main hope with SDM was to stop the pipeline of people with DD going right into guardianship at age 18, which I agree the pipeline needs to stop! However there are concerns with the language. The language sets up a "formal signed agreement" by which the language says that the "Supporter" can make and implement certain decisions for the "principal". As currently written, this isn't much different than guardianship except it doesn't have the protection from the courts.

This only reinforces the notion that many people with DD are at least somewhat incompetent so need someone formally monitoring their decisions starting at age 18. It is true that within parameters of cognitive severity, some people do require a guardian when they turn 18, however it is so easy to get guardianship of 18 year olds with DD right now – they don't even get a chance to try out decision making for themselves. Name me 1 typical 18 year old who makes great decisions and I will show 10 who make horrible decisions. SDM is a naturally occurring phenomenon, we all engage in when trying to figure out difficult decisions; buying a house, whether I should leave the person I'm dating, etc, so why should there be a "formal agreement" specifically for people with DD? The language should be removed and rewritten to reflect the informal process the majority of people go through when making a decision.