

Filomena Nelson
Senate Medicaid Committee
Interested Party Testimony, House Bill 33
May 11, 2023

Our son Gregory is 29 years old. He graduated from Wright State University in December 2019, took a part time position as an online social media manager for the Ken Anderson Alliance in 2020, and moved into his own condo in 2022. He is living his dream as are so many others within his peer group. However, Gregory's path was not like that of most people his age. Gregory is completely dependent on others for his physical needs and relies on assistive technology for his speech. As a result of his physical limitations, many of his accomplishments would not have been possible without the assistance of caring direct support professionals (DSPs) and the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities.

With the support of his DSPs, Gregory was able to live on campus at Wright State. He currently travels to work and attends many Bengals, FC Cincinnati and Cincinnati Reds games with his DSPs. Sports are his passion. He is not able to be here today but asked me to suggest you follow him on twitter [OH_sportsdude](#)

I hope you can see that Gregory is very much like the rest of us as far as his interests, motivations and goals. He just happens to be in a body that doesn't work like ours. We are aware that it wasn't that long ago, individuals with complex physical needs would not be living, working or socializing in our society and again are so grateful to all of those who have assisted Gregory.

Gregory's DSPs must be physically able to provide his personal care and willing to learn the sophisticated technology he relies on for his speech, his work and his mobility. Without functional use of his hands, Gregory uses a switch (which looks a lot like the Easy Button Staple's uses in their marketing.) This switch is positioned near his cheek and while the software scans, Gregory clicks and select what he wants to say or type on his iPad. He also uses that switch to control his television and other home environmental controls. With the help of the OSU Assistive Technology Center, we are exploring how he can control his devices with his eyes. When Gregory is trialing the newest devices or software, his DSPs support him and learn the technology as well.

Supporting Gregory has been a life-long process. That process includes recruiting, training, and managing personal care aides. A significant challenge in recruiting qualified and motivated individuals who are willing to learn how to support Gregory, is the lack of a competitive hourly rate for direct support professionals. This has always been a challenge but has become increasingly more difficult in the last few years. As family members and advocates, we are grateful to the House and Senate for approving and Governor DeWine for signing the historic budget increases in previous years, as well his investment proposed in the current Executive Budget. We appreciate the House's recent vote to raise the average statewide hourly wage of

DSPs. We are asking you to not just maintain the House's version but strongly encourage you to adopt a budget that pays DSPs the competitive rate of \$20 an hour. This competitive wage would attract those individuals who have the empathy and the desire to work with individuals with disabilities but have found themselves in positions in the fast food or retail industries, simply because those industries are paying more.

Many years ago, our family adopted a slogan from the United Negro College Fund as our so-called mission statement. That statement is, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." We hope you agree with us. Thank you so much for the opportunity to share Gregory's and our family's story.