

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

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

My name is Karen Wojtala, I am a mother and guardian of an adult son with Developmental Disabilities (DD) and a Shared Living Provider through Koinonia Homes.

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.

The Ohio DD Crisis hit home for our family. Our son had lived in supported living through Koinonia Homes, with support of Direct Support Professionals (DSP's) for over 15 years. Sadly, 17 months ago, Koinonia could no longer provide services to my son and his roommate due to the severe staffing shortages. We brought our son home to live with us, as there were no other viable options, and I became his Shared Living Provider. This has been an adjustment, but we love our son deeply and want the best for him. Since that time, I have not been able to secure DSP support through HPC (Home Personal Care), as well as struggles to find Respite Care. This is all due to lack of DSP resources. Their job is a challenging one, and need to be paid an equitable salary to perform their duties.

DSP's are an essential life line for people with DD. My son lived in an apartment that he was very proud of! He liked his independence, and most of the staff that supported him in everyday life. Staff helped him with medications, food preparation, daily household chores, activities in the community, and his CPAP Machine at night. Securing qualified, trained and consistent staff is an essential support. This is part of the Independent living philosophy which is based on the belief that person with disabilities have the same rights as persons without disabilities to participate in and contribute to community life.

As an aging parent, I wonder how he will be cared for when I am gone. I wonder when I will be able to get a break as his primary everything. I wonder when and how he will transition back to live his best independent life with the necessary supports.

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 to the committee for your time and for the opportunity to testify today.

Karen Wojtala

Karen Wojtala
Snorkelfish14@gmail.com
7860 Wallings Road, North Royalton, OH 44133
216.678.7085