



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

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

I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Doreen Ehlert and I am the Chief Executive Officer of Ability Works, and we are located in Sandusky, Ohio but serve individuals in Erie, Huron, Ottawa, Lorain, Sandusky, and Seneca counties. Ability Works provides day, non-medical transportation, transition, home and personal care, community integration, and employment services administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). Our team of 42 employees and an additional 20 staff during the summer are proud to provide essential services to 242 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

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.

Our agency has been in Erie County for almost forty years and as staff begin to retire, we are struggling to compete with the many manufacturers that have the capability of paying a living wage to people who might have the interest and desire to work in this field. While this work may be incredibly fulfilling, unless we can pay staff a wage that will provide stability for them and their family, we will not be able to continue providing the services that are desperately needed in the communities we serve.

Many of the families and individuals we serve have been receiving these services since graduating and transitioning from high school. Several of the individuals we serve can't work in the community so families depend on our services and feel incredibly fortunate to have a provider that they can trust and depend on.

House Bill 33 as passed by the House is a great foundation to reinforce and rebuild the services provided by Ability Works. 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 at least an average of \$20.64. This investment will help us recruit and retain the workforce needed to continue to provide our quality services.

With your leadership, together we can ensure these services are available to the Ohioans that so greatly need them! Thank you again, for the opportunity and privilege to bring my concerns before you and if I can ever be of any help in this process, please let me know.