



May 10, 2023

**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 Hester Brown, and I am the Associate Director of Community Inclusion for OakLeaf Services at United Cerebral Palsy Association (UCP) of Greater Cleveland. We are headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio, founded in 1950 by concerned parents, and serve individuals with all types of disabilities, not just Cerebral Palsy, mainly in Cuyahoga, Lorain, and Medina Counties. We provide support for about 325 adults and 825 children with intellectual, developmental, and other types of disabilities annually. Our team of 175 employees are proud to provide essential services to Ohioans with disabilities. I oversee our two residential Intermediate Care Facilities (ICFs) as well as Day Services funded through the Home and Community-Based Waiver program administered by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD).

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.

We have experienced many challenges over the past 3 years. The day and employment services systems in Ohio are woefully underfunded, with waiver rates set in 2007, increasing by only 4% (in 2022). Our costs of doing business have increased tremendously in the past 15 years. We have had to increase Direct Support Professional (DSP) wages by 40% since 2020, to try to compete for talent with other industries offering higher wages for entry-level jobs. This has led our agency to operate with significant deficits that initially were covered by federal pandemic relief. But recently, we have had to tap our limited reserves to fund these wage increases, and this practice is not sustainable. Despite offering increased wages, we still had an 60% turnover rate for DSPs in 2022.

Since the pandemic, we also were forced to close two day services locations, serving 60 individuals, and today, we are providing only about 60% of the services we did in early 2020 at our main location. Much of this capacity decline is due to our inability to adequately staff DSP positions. If reimbursement rates are not increased substantially, we will likely need to discontinue more services within the next five years. This would be a tragic outcome for our community, but especially for our 175 employees, and the more than 1,100 individuals who depend on us for their care and support.

UCP of Greater Cleveland serves a specific niche, particularly in our group homes and day services—persons with very involved, complex physical and medical needs. In order to maintain health and safety for this fragile population, we need to employ a greater number of DSPs to safely care for them. Yet, as noted above, we have great difficulty offering competitive wages to attract those critical staff. We would like to have our individuals

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spend meaningful time in their communities but currently struggle to meet basic needs let alone have the staff resources to access community engagement.

Without access to our services, families would struggle to find specialized services and supports for their loved ones jeopardizing their health and safety. Many would not be able to work to support themselves and their families, becoming dependent on government support and likely slipping into poverty.

Thank you for your past support of the DD system in Ohio. We are very encouraged by the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Hauck for DODD and are very appreciative of the additional investments adopted by the House of Representatives in House Bill 33 to raise direct care staff wages. House Bill 33 as passed by the House is a great foundation to stabilize, reinforce and rebuild the services provided by UCP. The changing labor landscape and accompanying shortage of workers threatens our ability to provide the critical supports on which the people we serve and their families rely.

We encourage you to support the House's version of H.B. 33 as it pertains to DODD. 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 (similar to DSPs at state-operated Developmental Centers already). This investment will help us recruit and retain the workforce needed to continue to provide our quality services. Unlike other businesses, we cannot raise our prices to support increased wages for our team members. Only the legislature can make this long-overdue investment.

With your leadership, together we can ensure these services are available to the Ohioans with disabilities who 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.

Sincerely,

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