

My name is Jennifer Corcoran and this is my son, Matthew Helton. We are here in support of H.B. 33 establishing operating appropriations for fiscal years 2024-2025 and specifically for the proposed appropriations in support of Ohioans with developmental disabilities.

Matthew is 22 years old and part of the 17% of Ohioans with developmental disabilities (cdc.gov). But more importantly, Mathew is a young man who has a right and responsibility to be a productive member of his community. For 22 years, Matthew has grabbed the attention of his family, friends, community members, and peers with his humorous outlook, calm demeanor, and drive to improve society. You may look at him and wonder how I know that. If you slow down, observe his actions, and try to understand what happens in his mind, you can't miss it. This is what he has done for me.

I wear many hats. First and foremost I am Mom to Matthew and his two older brothers, Ryan and Alex. I was an educator for 17 years. I am the co-lead for Changing Spaces Ohio, one of 19 state chapters of a national organization advocating for height adjustable adult size changing tables, or universal changing tables. Finally, I am a Program Consultant for the Montgomery County Board of Developmental Disabilities Services. It is through my multiple hats, I can attest that the proposed budget is desperately needed. In the respect of time, I will address only a few areas.

Regarding wages for direct support professionals, including home and community-based services, Matthew attends an adult day support program and we have a direct support professional come into our home to assist so he can receive the care he needs and deserves and I can hold a part-time job to pay improve my community and to pay the bills. Those working in both sectors are making such low wages, they often have no choice to move to alternative jobs. There is an abundance of individuals who have the desire and heart to assist people like Matthew, but affording to live on the wages is near impossible. Matthew has had to deal with change of staff over and over throughout his lifetime. I often wonder if he could be more independent if we could have had a more consistent team as he developed. That is something I will never know.

The lack of universal changing tables has driven Matthew and me to spend every day advocating for a change. Therefore, we have a strong opinion regarding the appropriations to support partnering with state and local partners to increase the availability of universal changing tables in public places and businesses. Without universal tables in public places, our only options for inclusion are to be humiliated by changing in public places in the back of a van or on the ground or to feel isolated and stay home. I believe it is the responsibility of us as citizens to participate in shaping society and everyone deserves to share their talents within the community. Matthew struggles to practice his responsibility because society excludes him with the lack of restroom accommodations. Can you participate in your community without restroom accommodations?

Finally, due to my hat as a mom and as an educator and program consultant, I strongly support appropriations to appoint at least one person eligible for services to be appointed to each county board of developmental disabilities. Just as Matthew needs a voice, so do others with developmental disabilities. We are trying to develop our system of support for this large population. Why would we do it without the voice of the individuals who need the support. As I stated before, we have to slow down, observe, and listen to our individuals. Isn't that what we are doing today and how our democratic society is run? It takes money to provide the resources necessary for us all to have the rights and responsibilities as citizens. For these reasons we support H.B.33.

