



ECHOING HILLS

## Testimony on SFY 24/25 Operating Budget

### Senate Medicaid Committee

Chairman Romanchuk, Vice Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Ingram, and esteemed Medicaid Committee Members,

I want to thank you for the opportunity to be heard and you taking the time to read my testimony.

My name is Michelle Copher and I am the Program Director at Echoing Hills of Southwest Ohio, we are located in Dayton Ohio. We are an organization that provides care, love, support, companionship and so much more to individuals with intellectual disabilities at intermediate care facilities, residential day programs, and a community-based waiver programs administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). Our team of over 150 employees are proud to provide essential services to over 80 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities

I am very supportive of the budget initiatives recently passed by the Ohio House, but the funding isn't enough to reach stability. The changing labor landscape and accompanying shortage of workers, including direct support professionals (DSP), threatens our ability to provide the critical support on which the people we serve and their families rely.

There are many other places that pay their employees so much more. Not to take away from fast food restaurant workers, I know their jobs are extremely important and they have a lot to deal with, however, for us we are entrusted with someone's sister, mother, father, brother. The life of their loved ones is put into our hands. We strive every day to give them the best care we can. When there is not enough staff it makes it difficult to give each individual the attention they need and deserve. If we could hire more staff and give them a proper wage, we could help make the lives of the individuals that much greater. Staff would be more inclined to stay. DSPs go through a lot on a daily basis. Being a DSP is not for anyone. The people you care for become family and for some individuals a DSP is all the family they have. So when a DSP has to leave and find a better paying job that affects the individuals. It's like losing a member of your family. That individual may feel as though their family is abandoning them again. That DSP may feel as though they are leaving someone they truly cared for. For some people this is not just a job but it is their life.

It is very important for a DSP to feel appreciated. Parents of the individuals we serve trust that we are doing right by their loved one. Most parents are feeling guilty that they had to place their loved one in a facility. So it's up to DSPs to show that we are capable of taking care of their individual. It gives them some comfort in the difficult decision they had to make but when we are constantly having to find new staff because they can't support their families it's hard on the parents. Their loved one has no stability.



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The House's budget, is a great foundation to reinforce and rebuild the services provided by Echoing Hills. I encourage this Committee to approve the House DODD budget and to invest additional dollars to raise direct support professional wages to at least an average of \$20.00. 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.

Michelle Copher

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