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

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Neil Everett, and I am proud to be the Vice President of Human Resources of Hattie Larlham Center for Children with Disabilities (dba Hattie Larlham). Hattie Larlham is one of the largest providers of services for Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD) with 93 service locations throughout Cuyahoga, Franklin, Delaware, Medina, Portage, Summit, and Stark Counties. Hattie Larlham has a comprehensive list of services that are administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) that include adult day programs, waiver residential services, ICF residential services, including a 124-bed full-service ICF, employment services, foster services, and a pre-school. Our dedicated staff of 850 employees are proud to provide essential care, services, and supports to over 1,600 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. In my estimation, this is the single most important investment made for Ohio ID/DD providers. The pandemic and workforce crisis have had a crippling impact on staffing for our essential Ohio industry that has paid its direct support staff at poverty-level wages for decades prior to March 2020. We are competing with all employers for candidates to fill entry-level positions (i.e. Walmart, Arby's, etc.) because our reimbursement dictates wages less than the market bears. Our positions require more responsibility, are more complex and challenging, making a job candidate's decision easy to get paid more for an easier job at a different employer. Without offering wages that can compete with market employers, we have already lost the battle. While the customers of competitive employers have a variety of options to choose from, our customers (ID/DD) do not. With each passing day there are less Ohio providers of ID/DD services due to low reimbursement and the inability to compete for qualified staff.

House Bill 33 as passed by the House is certainly a step in the right direction. It means we are being heard, but perhaps not loudly enough. We encourage this committee to support the House's version of H.B. 33 as it pertains to DODD appropriations and we encourage the Senate to invest additional dollars to raise direct support professional wages to at least an average of \$20.64, knowing that this level of investment is needed and will help us recruit and retain the workforce required to continue the provision of essential services to a population that has no other options.

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.

Kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Neil Everett".

**Neil Everett**

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