



Hattie Larlham ICF Services  
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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 Okey Ekechi and I am the Residential Program Director of Hattie Larlham. Hattie Larlham provides coordination to the ICF/Group homes in our Cuyahoga & Summit Co. locations. We have residents with intellectual/developmental disabilities who strive for independent living skills and daily achievement to the best of their abilities. The direct support professional staff work 24/7 to ensure and provide their personal care and medical needs which are administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). Our team of (850 full & part-time) employees are proud to provide essential services to 1600 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.

The Cuyahoga & Summit Co. residential homes serve 40 residents with IDD with the need for 24/7 direct support professional staffing. Given the low reimbursement rates and the current staffing crisis we struggle daily to meet the consistent needs that the residents so dearly require to ensure that they live their lives to the fullest. Our goals at the ICF residential homes and throughout Hattie Larlham are to have the residents (all 1600) be afforded every opportunity to engage in daily life skills and participate within their community.

We need the additional staff to allow this to happen daily, weekly & monthly. The residents with IDD should be afforded the opportunity to participate and interact within their community where they live. Our staff are the backbone of our agency. The staff become the advocates & develop close bonds with the residents, becoming close to family and to their family. The staff are needed desperately within the residential homes to assist the residents with medical appointments, grocery shopping, food preparation and their personal care (bathing, feeding etc.)

House Bill 33 as passed by the House is a great foundation to reinforce and rebuild the services provided by Hattie Larlham. 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.

*Okey Ekechi*

Okey Ekechi

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