



Testimony of Michelle Gifford
Board Member, Pickaway County Board of DD
House Finance Committee
March 13, 2025



Chairman Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and Members of the House Finance Committee, my name is Michelle Gifford, and I am proud to serve as a board member at the Pickaway County Board of Developmental Disabilities. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today in support of House Bill 96.

I decided it was important to testify because this is my life. The decisions you make directly affect my day-to-day experience, my independence, and my ability to contribute to my community. I want to make sure my voice, and the voices of others like me, are heard.

I became a board member because I love all people, and I want to fight for what we need and want. I share this passion with other board members, who also support my desire to serve in this role.

What I love most about being a board member is that I get to bring up issues that affect people with disabilities in my community. Not only do I get to speak up, but I also get a vote in decisions that impact our lives. That is important because we—people with disabilities—know what we need. We live this life every day, and our experiences give the board a better understanding of what it's like to navigate the world with a disability.

Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) play a huge role in my life. They help me manage important aspects of my life every day. They help me when it's time to eat. They help me when it's time to take a bath. They support my independence, allowing me to live my life without relying entirely on my family or my husband.

For DSPs to continue doing this important work, they need to be paid enough to support their own families. Fair pay is not just about wages—it's about respect and appreciation for the critical work they do.

Over the past two years, since DSP wages have increased, my life has improved a lot. More caregivers are available when I need them, which means I have more consistency and higher-quality support. That stability makes a real difference in my life.

I want to personally thank this committee for increasing DSP wages in the last budget. When my caregivers feel good about their jobs and are respected for their work, it makes my life better and easier.

I urge you to continue supporting DSPs in this budget so they can continue supporting me and others like me. Your decisions shape our lives, and we are counting on you to ensure that people with disabilities have the support we need to live independently and with dignity.

Thank you for your time and consideration.