



Good morning Chairman Stewart, Vice-Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and esteemed committee members,

Thank you for letting me provide written testimony regarding Ohio House Bill 96.

My name is Tashawna Church, and I work as an ICF Home Manager at the Rowland Home in Lorain, Ohio, which is a part of Echoing Hills. At the age of 19, I started working with Echoing Hills 18 years ago as a Direct Support Professional (DSP). Over the years, I have grown in this industry, and as a Home Manager, I play a vital role. I empower DSPs to thrive, ensure we have the right team in place, and step in whenever needed, all because I genuinely love what I do and the people we serve.

Before the last budget's pay increase, many DSPs barely got by, working long hours yet still struggling to afford rent, groceries, and necessities. Some had to choose between paying bills or putting food on the table, so they had to seek employment elsewhere – in a different field. The high turnover and constant staff shortages left those of us who stayed drowning in extra shifts just to keep things running. As a Home Manager, I worked around the clock, not just overseeing staff but stepping in to cover endless shifts myself. No matter how hard we worked, it never felt like enough, and with the rising cost of living, survival became a daily battle.

Receiving the raise helped me manage the rising cost of food, ensuring my family could continue to have healthy and nutritious meals. While providing financial relief and stability, this allowed me to support my loved ones without added stress.

I am concerned because the Governor's proposed budget does not include any additional funding to further boost DSP wages, despite the continued shortages of staff. We are at risk of losing more hardworking, compassionate workers, and I fear for the wellbeing of the people we serve if that happens. We simply can't afford to lose more qualified, caring workers.

**I ask you to:**

- 1. Maintain the Governor's investment in ICFs.**
- 2. Create a system to regularly adjust pay so we don't face this crisis again.**

The individuals that we care for here at Echoing Hills depend on us – the frontline team. They deserve stability in their home without a revolving door of turnover. We need to make sure that this is a job that people can afford to do, so we can continue to provide quality care and meaningful life experiences.

Thank you for your time.

*Tashawna Church*

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