



Jennifer Kucera

Chair, The Ohio Olmstead Task Force

May 11, 2025

Interested Party Testimony, House Bill 96

Thank you Chair Stewart, Vice Chair Dovilla, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, for the opportunity to provide testimony on the importance of investing in home and community-based services for people with disabilities and aging Ohioans. My name is Jennifer Kucera and I am the Chair of the Ohio Olmstead Task Force (OOTF). On behalf of my organization, please accept this testimony regarding HB 96.

As discussed by many organizations, agencies, and individual representatives prior to today, the “trigger” language in Ohio’s budget for FY26-27 is extremely concerning. My most pressing concerns are:

- Amending the language in the “trigger” language for the Group VIII Medicaid Expansion population;
- Parity in funding that includes a cost-of-living adjustment for Direct Care Workers;
- Establishing a Direct Care Workforce Task Force in the Governor’s Office; and
- Protecting Self-Direction within the Department of Medicaid.

The current language in the budget would eliminate Medicaid coverage to over 700,000 Ohioans if the federal government reduced their federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP) below 90%. Group VIII provides health care coverage to many Direct Care Workers that provide in-home services and supports for people with disabilities and those who are aging. Terminating coverage for this population will negatively impact those most vulnerable. These workers would have to leave the workforce to find other jobs, leaving people with disabilities without care and at risk of possible institutionalization. **It is vital that Ohio continues to fund health care coverage for this population to ensure people with disabilities and those that are aging can remain in their communities.**

Ohio worked tirelessly last budget cycle to ensure Direct Care Workers were protected and received fair wages. The current funding has provided some assistance; however, we are asking that the wages be tied to a cost-of-living increase. Ohio is a quickly aging state and many individuals will need in-home care providers. Ohio must ensure that this workforce remains robust and workers are able to provide for themselves and their

families. In addition to a continuous cost of living increase on direct care providers wages, Ohio should create a Direct Care Worker Task Force to study the impact and need with concrete data. The Task Force should be comprised of individuals who utilize the services, providers, and agency representatives to provide recommendations on sustainability in wage growth and expanded access. **Without this enforcement of reform, the care system in Ohio will be unable to support the future need for in-home support.**

Advocates have worked tirelessly along the Department of Medicaid to ensure that Ohio's Self-Direction program works for those who utilize the service. Self-Direction allows for individuals with disabilities and those that are aging to have power and freedom in their care, choose what they pay their providers, and to be in-charge of how they receive their services. By supporting this program, we increase the fiscal responsibility of this community and follow the Olmstead Decision by ensuring Ohioans can remain in their homes and communities of choice. This program does not take providers away from agencies, but rather provides a model of care that empowers individuals to have a voice in the services they receive. The Department of Medicaid must be able to continue working alongside advocates without the interference of the legislature to ensure that the program is both sustainable and beneficial for all involved.

We all want Ohio to be a state that individuals, regardless of disability, see as a place to raise their family, age, and find meaningful employment. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on HB96, please let me know if you have any additional questions or concerns.

Sincerely

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About the Ohio Olmstead Task Force:

The Ohio Olmstead Task Force (OOTF) is a statewide grassroots coalition of Ohioans with disabilities of all ages, family members, advocates and organizations advocating for the right to live, work and participate in their communities. Formed in 2002, OOTF supports the Supreme Court decision that held unnecessary institutionalization is discrimination against people with disabilities.

OOTF's mission is to advocate, educate, and support change for all people with disabilities by ensuring their rights to participate in a thriving community life.