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TO: State of Ohio House Finance Committee  
Chairman Stewart  
Vice-Chair Dovilla  
Ranking Member Sweeney  
Esteemed Committee Members

RE: Testimony on SFY 26/27 Operating Budget

I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding SFY 26/27 State of Ohio Operating Budgets.

My name is Belinda Glavic Grassi and I am the Chief Financial Officer of Help Foundation, Inc. Help Foundation, Inc. is headquartered in Euclid, Ohio. Our agency serves developmentally and intellectually disabled individuals in Cuyahoga, Lake and Summit Counties. We provide a wide array of Medicaid Waiver services administered by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) and Vocational Rehabilitation under Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD). These services are provided to a largely under-represented population. Our footprint is expansive. We have the capacity to serve over 500 individuals every day at our 18 residential sites, 3 day programs, and 3 vocational training programs. We provide more than 200 transportation services daily, and a host of ancillary services out in our greater community. Our team of 200+ employees are proud to provide essential services to Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

I want to express our Agency's gratitude for the historic investment in disability services in the last state budget. The funding increase helped providers like us recover from a decade-long crisis that led to devastating workforce shortages. Thanks to your support, we have been able to:

- Significantly reduce our employee turnover.
- Increase our pool of qualified applicants for critical round-the-clock positions.
- Improve the continuity of care for the individuals we serve.
- Reduce overtime cost which is necessary for coverage but not reimbursed more favorably by Medicaid.

- Increase starting wages to also include incentives for Driving and MedPass qualifications.

I personally want to express my appreciation to Governor DeWine and Director Hauck for honoring the commitment made in the last General Assembly by using General Revenue Funds (GRF) to maintain the rate increases that were funded in part with ARPA dollars. This investment provides much-needed stability for providers and the people they serve.

***However, the budget does not include any additional funding to further boost direct support professional wages, despite the continued workforce crisis and rising costs. The last rate increase took effect in July 2024, and without action from this body, providers face a nearly four-year gap in rate adjustments—putting us right back in the crisis we just emerged from.***

To ensure Ohioans with disabilities and their families have access to the care they need, **we urge the General Assembly to:**

- 1. Include a rate increase for waiver providers** to keep up with inflation and workforce demands.
- 2. Establish a mechanism for ongoing increases** to prevent future funding crises.

Investing in these services is not just about providers – it is about ensuring Ohioans with disabilities receive the care and support they need to live full, independent lives in their communities. We look forward to working with you to build on the progress you’ve made and keep Ohio moving forward.

Thank you again for the opportunity and privilege to share my concerns. If I can ever be of any help in this process, please let me know.

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