



March 11, 2025

**Testimony on SFY 26/27 Operating Budget
House Finance Committee**

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

I want to thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

My name is Paul J. Soprano, and I am the Director of OakLeaf Services at United Cerebral Palsy Association (UCP) of Greater Cleveland. We are headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio, and serve individuals with all types of disabilities, primarily in Cuyahoga, Lorain, and Medina Counties. We are a 75-year-old not-for-profit business that provides support for about 320 adults and 1,000 children with intellectual, developmental, and other types of disabilities annually. Our team of 175 employees are proud to provide essential services to Ohioans with disabilities.

I lead the largest division of UCP of Greater Cleveland, OakLeaf Services for adults. We serve people in two residential ICF facilities as well as in day and employment services funded through the home and community-based waiver program administered by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) and Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD).

First, I want to express our deep 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:

- Improve staff retention from 58% to 75% in our adult day services program, stabilizing our workforce and improving continuity of care.
- Increase wages, with our current average Direct Support Professional (DSP) wage at \$19.25 per hour.
- Implement enhanced service quality measures, such as hiring a part-time Quality Assurance Manager, investing in staff training beyond regulatory compliance, implementing a new skills-building curriculum for persons served, and investing in technology (hardware and software) to improve documentation of service delivery and increase efficiency.

I 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-

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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 and support they need, we urge the General Assembly to:

1. Maintain the Governor's investment in ICFs, Multi-System Youth, and Technology First initiatives.
2. Include a rate increase for waiver providers to keep up with inflation and workforce demands.
3. 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 collaborating with you to build on the progress you have made and keep Ohio moving forward.

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.

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