



Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani, and distinguished committee members, my name is Kevin L. Miller, and I am the Director of Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD). I am pleased to present our 2026-2027 Biennial Budget for your consideration.

Moments after taking the oath of office, Governor Mike DeWine signed Executive Order 2019-03D, designating Ohio as a Disability Inclusion State and establishing it as a Model Employer of Individuals with Disabilities. Our mission is to ensure that all Ohioans have access to the necessary support, training, and opportunities to thrive within both the workforce and their communities. During testimony two years ago, we committed to making significant progress through investments in our budget, and I am pleased to provide an update on how we have fulfilled those promises.

OOD's metrics demonstrate substantial strides in empowering Ohioans with disabilities through improved employment opportunities, and they are reflected in the results. In Federal Fiscal Year 2024, OOD provided services to over 42,000 Ohioans with disabilities, which was 5,444 more individuals compared to Federal Fiscal Year 2023, a 14.8 percent increase.

Our Vocational Rehabilitation staff provide direct services to Ohioans with all types of disabilities through many programs and partnerships that lead to employment. This includes support for individuals with mental health or substance use disorders in specialized court dockets through OOD Jobs for Recovery, assistance for individuals with developmental disabilities through Employment First with the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, and resources for students ages 14 and older through the Ohio Transition Support Partnership in collaboration with the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce. For those unable to work due to a disability, OOD assists through our Division of Disability Determination, fully funded by the Social Security Administration.

Our Vocational Rehabilitation services are getting results for Ohioans with disabilities. Of individuals who engaged with our program, 59.4% are still employed one year after exiting, positioning us 9th in the nation. Among those enrolled in training programs, 49.2% earned a credential, **ranking Ohio 12th nationally**. An outstanding 73.8% of individuals in training programs made measurable skill gains toward earning a credential. This rank us 4th in the nation and exceeds the national average by 21.7 percentage points.

In Federal Fiscal Year 2024, OOD assisted nearly 4,000 college students with disabilities, a 48% increase from Federal Fiscal Year 2023, to pursue education that will lead to higher-wage employment. Investments through OOD Education Support Funds, which cover educational expenses, increased from nearly \$600,000 in Federal Fiscal Year 2023 to more than \$4.7 million in Federal Fiscal Year 2024, following announcements from Governor DeWine in August 2022 and 2023.

In partnership with the Ohio Department of Higher Education, OOD helped 46% more college students with disabilities (more than 1,000 students) through Ohio College2Careers (Ohio C2C) in Federal Fiscal Year 2024 than the previous Fiscal Year. This program specifically partners with Ohio's public colleges and universities, and we have a presence at every university, regional branch campus, and community college.

Launched in July 2023, the Accessible Ohio (AO) program partners with Ohio's businesses, communities, venues, and attractions statewide to support their accessibility goals. Since its inception, our AO team has established 191 partnerships, including Cincinnati Nature Center, Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, City of Blue Ash, and Sauder Village. The team has provided 282 consultations and conducted 43 training sessions for more than 3,700 attendees. The program has supported 28 accessibility enhancements, including accessible doors and seating, sensory areas, and wheelchair charging stations, and created more than 50 online resources to educate on various accessibility topics. The inaugural Accessible Ohio Conference and Expo on July 23, 2024, attracted over 300 attendees, vendors, and guests, reflecting Ohio's commitment to help all Ohioans fully participate in everything our state offers.

OOD has launched a branded mobile unit to enhance employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities and bring services directly to them in rural and underserved areas of Ohio. Since its introduction in late July 2024 at the Ohio State Fair, the unit has participated in 29 events, including transition, reentry, and job fairs. This initiative not only increases access to vital resources but also fosters collaboration with employers, state and local agencies, and community organizations.

Our results are only possible through collaborative efforts with state and local agencies, Vocational Rehabilitation providers across the state, and employer partners such as King's Island, Worthington Steel, and Sirna and Sons Produce. The budget before you reflects an ongoing commitment to enhancing our services and maximizing the impact for those we serve. People with disabilities are our co-workers, neighbors, customers, friends, family members, and

constituents who want the same opportunities as everyone else, whether it's excelling in a career or simply being included.

Governor DeWine's proposed budget supports Ohioans with disabilities, empowering them to find careers, stability, purpose, meaning, connection, and independence. Supporting individuals with disabilities to gain employment and fully participate in their communities reduces reliance on government benefits and generates tax dollars.

OOD's budget represents a state investment of \$43.9 million in General Revenue Funds in each year of the biennium. With a generous federal match and innovative programs, OOD is uniquely positioned to do its part in strengthening Ohio's economy. I respectfully ask for your support of the investments that this budget makes in Ohioans with disabilities and your local districts. I would be more than happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.