



Clear Skies Ahead, LLC

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Testimony on SFY 26/27 Operating Budget House Health Committee

Chairwoman Schmidt, Vice-Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani, and esteemed committee members,

I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Catherine Brooks, and I am the CEO of Clear Skies Ahead, we are headquartered in Niles, OH and serve Trumbull and Geauga Counties. We provide residential Medicaid Waiver services for individuals with developmental disabilities administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). Our team of 57 employees are proud to provide essential services to 27 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

First, I want to express our deep gratitude for the 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:

- Increase applicants, allowing us to fill critical positions and provide more reliable services.
- Reduce overtime costs, which are necessary for coverage but are not reimbursed by Medicaid.
- Expand services to individuals we previously had to turn away due to staffing shortages.
- Increase wages, with our current average Direct Support Professional wage at \$17.50 per hour.

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-needed stability for providers and the people they serve. However, the budget does not include any additional funding to further boost DSP 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.



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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 DD services is not just about providers—it's 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 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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