

Testimony on SFY 26/27 Operating Budget House Health Committee

Dear House Health Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share my family's story. I'm Kirk Reid, father of Randy Reid, who receives services at Echoing Hills.

My wife Dot was seven-and-half months pregnant, and she was ready to deliver our son Randy. The obstetrician was delivering other babies, so the nurses held Randy back. This cut off the oxygen supply to his brain, which caused Cerebral Palsy. He spent 77 days in an incubator. Back then, they didn't know it, but too much oxygen in an incubator causes Retrolental Fibroplasia, which is the destruction of the retina in the eye, and it leads to blindness.

Growing up Randy required a lot of time with his daily care. We had two other sons, Pete and Scott, and we felt they were often left out because we were spending so much time with Randy (my wife during the day while I was at work, and I would take over when I returned home in the evenings). We were introduced to Echoing Hills through its camping program, which is a great benefit as it offers families a safe and fun place to take their child so the rest of the family can have a special time together. Every year our family vacation was centered around when Randy would be at camp.

Although Randy doesn't have eyesight and speaks using a communication board, he wanted his independence. At age 31, his 27-year-old brother Pete was struck by a drunk driver, and he was paralyzed from the chest down. Echoing Hills was God sent during this challenging time. This gave Randy an opportunity to move to Echoing Ridge because Pete now needed us. When he moved into Echoing Ridge, he had many friends already living there – he had met them at Camp Echoing Hills. He never looked back. We knew he would never want to come back home. To Randy, being at Echoing Ridge was like not even having a disability because he was out on his own. Making his own decisions. In 2015, he moved to Echoing Hills' new six-bed homes which offered even more independence. He would have his own bedroom which was of major importance because when Randy was in his room he used his talking books which could be a disturbance his roommates. Conversely, a roommate watching television is very disturbing to someone who is blind. He has greatly enjoyed his home, where he gets to live with five of his best friends. The staff at the home are an integral part as well, they are family.

Randy, as I shared, is non-verbal. His only means of conversation is a communication board. He uses his fingers to point to letters to spell words, and sometimes due to lack of eyesight and his Cerebral Palsy, he may be off a letter. This can become frustrating for all. He gets upset because he fails to express himself, and the DSP is at a loss to know what he desires. However, there are some team members who, because they know Randy so well, he simply has to point to the first letter, and they will know what he wants. Even when he points to just a T, they know he means a Y – which is yes. They know his personality and characteristics. They know what makes him happy, and what concerns him. They can tell when he isn't feeling good, and what he needs. And it is the same with the others that live at the Rayl Home. Each person is unique, and they have their own personalities. They have their own way to communicate. The only way each person

can be effectively understood is through a trusted relationship, by getting to know them personally. When staff retention is low and turnover is high, there is no possible way to provide a quality and safe environment because they don't have a history with the person.

Our family was very grateful when the last budget increase took place so Echoing Hills could increase wages to retain existing team members, and to attract good solid employees. The DSPs deserve a fair wage. Their work is very important, providing care for very vulnerable people. We know there is a great need for good, solid healthcare workers. But if we can't pay them enough to fulfill their financial responsibilities, they will have to go where they can earn more money. I truly believe the direct support professionals at Echoing Hills have a great love for the individuals they serve. I visit twice weekly, and I witness it firsthand. I am blessed to see how much they care for Randy and his friends. But it is critical that the state's budget continues to invest in this workforce, so we don't lose the people with the heart to serve because they have no other choice if their pay doesn't consistently increase with the cost of living.

I ask you to consider including **a rate increase for DSPs in waiver settings** – my son attends an adult services program throughout the week, and also **to create a budget that will regularly adjust the pay so we do not face this DSP workforce crisis again** as it isn't fair to the person being served and the person not getting paid a fair wage.

These services are essential for people like Randy, his friends, and our families. Thank you, Echoing Hills and the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, for giving us the support we needed, and I thank all of you for learning our story and why this is so important to us and other families just like ours.

Sincerely,



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