

## **Testimony on SFY 26/27 Operating Budget House Health Committee**

Good morning, Chairwoman Schmidt, Vice-Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani, and committee members.

Thank you for letting me speak to you today.

My name is Latasha Heisel, and I'm a Direct Support Professional (DSP) and an Independent Provider. I work in Hamilton County, Cincinnati, Ohio and provide services like personal care, transportation, community integration, etc. I've been a DSP for 15 years and an Independent Provider for 6 years.

Before the last budget's pay increase, DSPs were struggling with providing great care for our clients that didn't have much funding to enjoy our outdoor activities, making sure that our bills are paid on time along with having gas money to transport our clients. I loved my work, but I couldn't afford my rent on what I was making. I had to work two other jobs just to make ends meet. I almost left the field entirely. I started looking for jobs at the grocery store because they paid more. I had to work so much overtime that I never saw my family and friends. It was stressful and exhausting but knowing that the job needs to be done to provide for our community serving those with disabilities.

Since the pay increase, things have changed for the better. I was able to cut back to one other part-time job and focus on being a good DSP and Independent Provider. I can finally afford to put money away for retirement. This has made a real difference in my life and the lives of the people I support. Thank you for recognizing the importance of this work.

I'm concerned because the Governor's proposed budget doesn't include more money for DSPs or Independent Providers working in waiver settings. Without action from you, we'll be right back where we started. We can't afford to lose more qualified, caring workers.

I ask you to:

1. Include a rate increase for DSPs and Independent Providers in waiver settings.
2. Create a system to regularly adjust pay so we don't face this crisis again.

The people I support rely on me and other DSPs. We need to make sure this is a job people can afford to do, so we can continue providing quality care.

Thank you for your time.

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