



Testimony on SFY 26/27 Operating Budget House Health Committee

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

My name is Scott Marks, and I am the Vice-President of the Ohio Provider Resource Association (OPRA). I submit this testimony on behalf of OPRA and our members across the state who support Ohioans with developmental disabilities and their families. I start by thanking you, Ohio's lawmakers, for your support of the developmental disability community and for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

In my role at OPRA I have the privilege of working closely with our Community Employment Service providers, a contingency of over 50 OPRA members. These members are committed to helping Ohioans with developmental disabilities find and retain jobs in their communities through services funded and coordinated by Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD). **I submit this testimony to express our support for the budget initiatives for OOD as outlined in HB 96.**

First, I want to express my sincere gratitude to this legislature for its support of Vocational Rehabilitation services in the last biennium budget. Through your investment, we were able to work collaboratively with Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) to increase service rates by 5% across the board, with additional targeted increases for critical, high-need services. Additionally, we were able to work with OOD to develop pathways for services for people with the most significant barriers to employment and develop a plain language service schedule, increasing accessibility and understanding for job seekers and their families. Your investment stabilized a service field that had been hit hard by the workforce shortage of Direct Support Professionals. Maintaining this investment is integral in ensuring that providers can continue to deliver high-quality, individualized employment services that help Ohioans with disabilities find meaningful and sustainable careers.

Access to quality employment services allows individuals with disabilities to pursue careers that match their skills, interests, and ambitions. Stable, sustainable funding ensures that people with disabilities can participate fully in Ohio's workforce, contributing to their communities and achieving greater independence.

Additionally, I want to highlight the importance of the *Adaptable Ohio* initiatives within this budget. These initiatives provide increased access and opportunity for individuals with disabilities, reinforcing Ohio's commitment to being a leader in inclusive employment. By supporting flexible, person-centered employment strategies, this budget ensures that more Ohioans can benefit from vocational services tailored to their unique needs.



OPRA members take great pride in delivering high-quality and efficient services, and this budget supports them in continuing to meet the growing demand for employment services. Our providers remain committed to ensuring that every individual who wants to work has the opportunity to do so, and that employers have the resources needed to create inclusive workplaces.

Finally, I want to thank Director Kevin Miller and his team at OOD for their ongoing collaboration and dedication to expanding employment opportunities for Ohioans with disabilities. We look forward to continuing our partnership in making Ohio the best place for people with disabilities to pursue careers and achieve economic stability.

We deeply appreciate the committee's support of services for Ohioans with developmental disabilities. We look forward to working with you throughout this budget process and hope to be a resource in any matters concerning disability services. We are grateful and proud of our partnership with OOD and the work we get to do together, supporting Ohioans with disabilities to unlock their full potential in the career of their choosing. Thank you again for your time and for your commitment to ensuring that all Ohioans have access to meaningful employment opportunities.

Respectfully Submitted,

Scott Marks

Vice-President

Ohio Provider Resource Association