



Testimony on SFY 26/27 Operating Budget  
House Health Committee

Testimony of Kurt A. Miller

President/CEO – Empowering People Inc.

March 6, 2025

Chairwoman Schmidt, Vice-Chair Dester, ranking member Somani and esteemed members of the committee, my name is Kurt Miller and I am the President/CEO of Empowering People Inc. I would like to thank you all for the opportunity to share my testimony. Empowering People provides services and supports to over 300 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in ICF/IID homes and home and community based waiver settings. We currently have a team of over 540 wonderful employees in our organization providing exceptional care to the people we support.

I would like to start by expressing my sincere gratitude for Governor DeWine and this legislature's historic investment in last state budget for IDD services. That investment helped to stabilize a system that was teetering on disaster due to a historic workforce crisis. Thanks to the investment in wages for the direct support professionals (DSPs) and other direct support employees providers were able to not only attract new employees into our homes, but also retain the employees that had dedicated their lives to supporting Ohioans with disabilities. The

increased recruitment and retention due to the investment permitted providers to serve more people that wanted or needed services.

Empowering People was able to increase our starting wage from \$15.00 to \$17.00 an hour in the ICF/IID and from \$13.00 to \$16.00 an hour in the I/O waiver homes. Currently, our average wage in the ICfs is \$22.37 and \$21.31 in the I/O waiver homes without OT. Including OT, the average wage is \$22.85 in the ICFs and \$22.53 in the I/O waiver homes. Empowering People also was able to reduce OT by 53% from 2023 to 2024. Overtime in the I/O waiver homes was reduced by 5% which sounds minimal. However, with OT not being a reimbursed expense in the I/O waiver reimbursement every reduction is vital to financial solvency.

There were many benefits that occurred due to the historic investment. Most notably, the number of applicants increased substantially with the increase to starting wages. This allowed us to be more selective in our hiring approach and ensure accountability through the organization. These benefits improved the services for the people we support and provided relief to their families who supported providers during the staffing crisis. Our current census has increased from 89% to 95%.

Additionally, as overtime was reduced, employees were able to work less hours, ensuring staff were well-rested and avoiding the burn-out that often led to high turnover rates in our field. I had the pleasure to attend a retirement party just this week for one of our employees that is retiring after 38 years as a DSP in the same location. A couple years ago I couldn't imagine a scenario where we would have an employee that would stay in the field that long. After the investment made in the previous budget, which increased wages for us by between 13% and 23%, I now have hope that we can attract more people who make supporting Ohioans with disabilities a career!

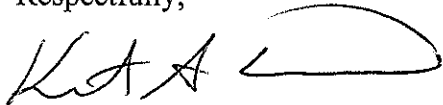
I want to express my appreciation to Governor DeWine and Director Hauck for continuing the commitment made in the previous general assembly by using general revenue funds (GRF) to maintain the rate increase that were funded in part by ARPA dollars. However, absent a continued investment that stability that occurred may be lost. The proposed budget does not include any additional funding to further enhance DSP wages, despite the continuing work force issues and rising costs. The last rate increase took effect in July of 2024 and absent any additional funding by this body, providers and their staff will face a nearly 4 year gap in any rate increase, essentially eliminating any progress made by the previous investment.

To ensure that Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families continue to have access to the vital services they require I am urging the general assembly to maintain the Governor's investment in ICFs, multi-system youth, and technology first initiatives. Include a rate increase for waiver providers to keep up with inflation and workforce demands. Finally, establish a mechanism for an on-going increase to prevent any future funding issues.

These investments will help to ensure that Ohioans with disabilities have the invaluable services and support they want and need to live full, happy, integrated and independent lives in their communities. These investments will aim to build on the progress made by the previous general assembly and continue to keep Ohio on the path to stability in the IDD system.

In conclusion, I want to again express my sincere gratitude for the previous investment and for the opportunity to share my story and concerns before you today. If I can be of any assistance moving forward please let me know. Thank you again for your time and attention and I will try to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kurt A. Miller', followed by a large, stylized loop or flourish.

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