

**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 Dan Connors, and I am the President/CEO of St. Joseph Home of Cincinnati, a not-for-profit business with a 150-year history in Cincinnati. We provide services to about 150 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities with a workforce of 260, most of which are Direct Support Professionals (known as DSPs) and Nurses. Specifically, our mission is to serve individuals with complex needs, including individuals who are ventilator dependent. We also operate a respite facility in partnership with the Hamilton County Board of Developmental Disabilities which supports individuals facing a housing crisis.

I want to begin by expressing my deep gratitude for the historic investment in disability services in the last state budget, which allowed us to increase the average base wage of our DSPs by 38%, stabilizing our workforce. Your investments also allowed us to build a matrix-based wage system for care staff to have the ability to increase their skills, help us achieve our mission in expanded ways and further increase their compensation.

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 and for their continuing commitment to the ICF program and individuals with complex medical needs.

My fear, however, is that what amounts to flat rates on the waiver side does not consider two important dynamics:

- The impact inflation has had on our workforce.
- How developmental disability is changing in our communities and what those changes mean to our staffing challenges.

Regarding inflation, St. Joseph Home partnered with two other providers in the Cincinnati area and received a grant to study our workforce. The results were sobering. Even though all three providers had made historic investments in their workforce, 94% of our DSP's reported that they did not feel financially secure and 45% of our workforce reported that they did not have the funds in reserve to handle a \$400 emergency. Inflation has affected us all, but as providers solely dependent on Medicaid, we struggle to keep up with a rapidly changing labor market.

While the impact of inflation is known to us all, there is another growing concern I have as a provider that is less well known outside of our field, and that is how developmental disability is changing in our communities. To put it very simply, people with developmental disabilities are growing in number, they live longer, and their needs are becoming significantly more complex from both a medical and behavioral standpoint.

This means we don't just need to maintain staff; we need staff who have higher skill levels and who can handle more complex situations. Consider that recently a young woman with a developmental disability and a long history of trauma arrived at our crisis facility for admission. Her history of trauma made her understandably scared to interact with our staff and she did feel comfortable coming inside. Our DSPs spent two (2) hours outside with her, earning her trust and she finally allowed them to assess her condition. They found she had severe wounds that required medical care and were able to transport her to the hospital. I'm not suggesting that staff have this level of interaction every day, but the frequency is growing rapidly. I know I don't just speak for St. Joseph Home but my peer providers when I say DSP work is not entry level, it takes highly complex skill. This is the future workforce we need.

I'll finally share that an adequately funded developmental disabilities system is not just the right thing to do, although that would be reason enough. It also, however, is a tremendous cost savings to the Medicaid system. In the last five (5) years, St. Joseph Home has welcomed 11 individuals to St. Joseph Home directly from an inpatient hospital stay where they had no discharge options outside of our services. We were able to provide them with all the services they need and save thousands of Medicaid dollars per day per person.

For these reasons, **we urge the General Assembly to help us move forward by:**

- 1. Maintaining the Governor's investment** in ICFs, Multi-System Youth, and Technology First initiatives.
- 2. Including a rate increase for waiver providers** to keep up with inflation and workforce demands.
- 3. Establishing a mechanism for ongoing increases** to prevent future funding crises.

Thank you again for the opportunity and privilege of testifying before you today. If I can ever be of any help in this process, please let me know.

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