



INDEPENDENCE

OF PORTAGE COUNTY

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Testimony on SFY 26/27 Operating Budget House Health Committee

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your unwavering commitment to Ohioans with developmental disabilities. My name is Michelle Madden, and I have the absolute privilege of serving as CEO of Independence of Portage County, where for 50 years we have proudly supported individuals with developmental disabilities across multiple counties.

Last budget cycle, I stood before you, tired and weary. My team had been working countless hours just to meet the basic needs of the people we have the honor to serve. And thanks to your leadership—and the incredible investment made through the last budget—you gave us the first real step toward stability. My heart is truly grateful. You listened. You acted. And because of that, we began to rebuild.

But this was just the first step.

Today, I'm here to ask you to keep going. The workforce crisis is still very real. Turnover remains dangerously high. Demand for services is increasing. And while we've made progress, we are still holding our breath as we are still just able to now sustain care for the people we already support and improve quality, but families are still running on fumes as our community is still not able to expand capacity to keep up with the demand for services for individuals with complex needs. Every day, we receive admission inquiries, and just now—years after the pandemic—we were finally able to bring a 7-bed ICF back online. It's progress, but it's fragile.

That's why we need to keep pushing forward, not just with funding, but with innovation. We must protect our most valuable resource—our Direct Support Professionals—and use them where only a human touch can make the difference.

At Independence of Portage County, we've embraced transformative technology, like the Resilience Model of Care, Nobi technology, and BSTN Software platforms. These tools give us real-time safety monitoring, health alerts, and automated documentation—and most importantly, they give our staff time back to focus on what matters most: people. We were able to invest in these technologies thanks to the ARPA grants offered by DODD.

What we came to realize is that technology is not a luxury anymore. It's the future of sustainable, high-quality care. And it's how we stabilize this system—by combining human compassion with smart solutions that give real-time data to assist in better care plans and prevention. By taking a more proactive approach, we can prevent crises before they happen.

But none of this works without a stable, valued, and supported workforce. Without DSPs, there is no care. There is no safety. There is no quality.

We need your continued partnership and action. Action that ensures our services are person-centered. That increases independence. That strengthens inclusion. And that allows people with developmental disabilities to lead fulfilling lives in their communities.

Thank you once more for believing in this work and for not just putting "whip cream on manure," as my colleague John Hannah said during his testimony last week, and instead, truly standing beside us. Together, we can complete what we began and secure the future of care in Ohio.

I am deeply grateful for your time and your ongoing commitment, and I would be honored to answer any questions.

Respectfully,



Michelle L. Madden, CEO

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