

Testimony of Dan Ottke, Superintendent
Clermont County Board of Developmental Disabilities
House Health Committee
March 6, 2025



Chairwoman Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani, and members of the House Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 96. My name is Dan Ottke, and I have the honor of serving as Superintendent of the Clermont County Board of Developmental Disabilities.

Ohio's 88 county boards of developmental disabilities have served people with disabilities and their families for nearly six decades. Built on community advocacy and family leadership, our system has evolved to meet individuals' changing needs.

In Clermont County, we have seen firsthand how the scope, magnitude, and complexity of needs presented by our population have grown, requiring greater far greater coordination, expertise, and resources than ever before.

This level of complexity is demonstrated in the increasing number of children and teenagers eligible for our services that have either intense behavioral or medical needs. As you can imagine, this can be difficult for parents as they attempt to provide a safe and stable home environment while maintaining their own employment and care for other children in the home.

In response, Clermont DD has increased its financial and staff investment to find the resources necessary to help meet families' challenges. These investments often include a tiered approach of parent and caregiver support—including family support services, intermittent respite services, Home and Community Based waiver services—as well as finding full-time stabilization services in facilities outside the home.

Despite the growth in scope and complexity, the board has also had to balance these needs with those of other people with disabilities across the lifespan, which are also growing at unprecedented rates. From Early Intervention Services for children birth to age three, to serving older adults that require around-the-clock residential support, county boards support a lifetime of services—making state investments ever more critical by the day.

Two years ago, our provider partners were facing a workforce crisis unlike any in the history of our system. Many families in Clermont County were experiencing significant disruptions in services. Fortunately, the General Assembly's action in the last budget made a critical difference by increasing Medicaid waiver reimbursement rates, allowing providers to raise DSP wages and stabilize our system's workforce.

In Clermont County, like counties across Ohio, our system's capacity to support people with disabilities has rebounded tremendously since the last budget. In preparing for this testimony, I spoke with Lindsey Jones at Residential Concepts, who is one of our area's largest providers. Since the last budget, she reported that they have seen a huge increase in retention, and for the first time in years, they are fully staffed on all shifts.

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Prior to the investments made in the last budget, we were regularly hearing from our most established providers about the significant challenges they were facing with staffing homes or providing direct service around the County. These calls have decreased, and we have seen the consistency of services stabilize as compared to before the rate increase.

To ensure this trend continues, we must see additional investment at the state level. The modest state-funded increases being proposed by the DD Budget Coalition—3.4% in FY 2026 and 2.3% in FY 2027—will help ensure that services remain stable and responsive to the needs of individuals and families, while also ensuring that this burden is not placed on local property taxpayers. County boards, including Clermont County, contributed local property tax dollars in the last budget to help support the rate increase, but these funds have reached their limit. We are grateful for this committee's support for our request.

Beyond funding, we continue to support efforts to expand opportunities for people with developmental disabilities, including continued investment in programs such as Multi-System Youth initiatives, Technology First, and Employment First. A little bit ago you heard from my colleague, Marci Straughter, about the impact that technology can have in the lives of people with disabilities.

In addition, DODD's budget request promises to continue giving others the same opportunities Marci has had, and then some. We also support the establishment of supported decision-making as a less restrictive alternative to guardianship, allowing more people to have control over their own lives with appropriate support.

In closing, I want to thank Governor DeWine, Director Hauck, and members of this committee for your ongoing commitment to Ohioans with developmental disabilities. Your investments have made a tangible difference, and continued state support is crucial to ensuring that people with disabilities and their families receive the services they need.

Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions.