



# **INDEPENDENCE**

## **OF PORTAGE COUNTY**

575 East Lake Street • Ravenna, OH 44266  
Phone (330)296-2851 • Fax (330) 296-6273

### **Testimony on SFY 26/27 Operating Budget**

#### **House Health Committee**

March 5, 2025

Chairwoman Schmidt, Vice-Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani, and Esteemed Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Craig Robinson, and I serve as the Quality Assurance Registered Nurse at Independence of Portage County. Headquartered in Ravenna, Ohio, we proudly provide a wide variety of services—Intermediate Care Facilities, Residential Waiver, Day and Employment, and Remote Monitoring—to 130 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities across multiple counties in northeastern Ohio. Our team of 200 employees is dedicated to ensuring these individuals receive the essential care and support they need to thrive. As a professional in this field and a parent who has adopted children with special needs after years of fostering, I bring both a clinical and personal perspective to the importance of House Bill No. 96 and its appropriations for FY 2026-2027.

First, I want to express my deep gratitude for the historic investment in disability services in the last state budget. That funding increase was a lifeline, helping providers like Independence of Portage County begin to recover from a decade-long workforce crisis. Thanks to your support, we have been able to:

- Increase applicants, allowing us to fill critical positions and provide more reliable services.
- Reduce overtime costs, which are vital for coverage but remain unreimbursed by Medicaid.
- Expand services to individuals we previously had to turn away due to staffing shortages.
- Implement quality measures through innovative technology, enhancing care delivery.
- Increase wages, with our current average Direct Support Professional wage at \$18.50 per hour.

I also commend Governor DeWine and Director Hauck for honoring the commitment made in the last General Assembly by using General Revenue Funds (GRF) to maintain rate increases previously supported by ARPA dollars. This stability has been critical for providers and the individuals we serve. However, I am concerned that the proposed budget lacks additional funding to further boost DSP wages, despite ongoing workforce shortages and rising costs. The last rate increase took effect in July 2024, and without further action, providers face a nearly four-year gap in adjustments—risking a return to the crisis we’ve only recently begun to overcome.

In my role, I’ve seen the real-world impact of funding gaps. Over the past couple of years, budget constraints forced several providers to delay updates to essential equipment, like adaptive tools for



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patients with mobility challenges, leaving individuals less comfortable and our staff stretched thin. On a personal level, raising children with special needs has shown me the difference funding makes: timely access to therapies and equipment when resources are available, versus months of delays—or outright denials—when they're not. These experiences, both professional and personal, underscore the human cost of inadequate investment.

To ensure Ohioans with disabilities and their families have access to the care they need, I urge the General Assembly to:

1. Maintain the Governor's investment in Intermediate Care Facilities, Multi-System Youth, and Technology First initiatives.
2. Include a rate increase for waiver providers to keep pace with inflation and workforce demands.
3. Establish a mechanism for ongoing increases to prevent future funding crises.

Investing in developmental disability services is about more than supporting providers—it's about empowering Ohioans with disabilities to live full, independent lives in their communities. As a nurse and a parent, I've seen how these investments transform lives, including those of my patients and my own family. I respectfully urge you to pass House Bill No. 96 with robust appropriations that build on the progress you've made and keep Ohio moving forward.

Thank you again for the privilege of bringing my concerns before you. If I can ever be of assistance in this process, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,

Craig Robinson

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