



# 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

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 Cora Denning and I am the Director of Human Resources at Independence of Portage County, we are headquartered in Ravenna Ohio and serve multiple counties across northeastern Ohio. We provide wide variety of services to intermediate **care facilities, Residential Wavier, Day, and Employment, Remote Monitoring services for individuals with intellectual disabilities** and administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). Our team of 200 employees are proud to provide essential services to 130 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

First, I want to express our deep gratitude for the historic investment in disability services in the last state budget. The funding increase helped providers like us recover from a decade-long crisis that led to devastating workforce shortages. Thanks to your support, we have been able to increase wages, with our current average Direct Support Professional wage at 18.50 per hour.

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. This investment provides much-needed stability for providers and the people they serve. However, the budget does not include any additional funding to further boost DSP wages, despite the continued workforce crisis and rising costs. The last rate increase took effect in July 2024, and without action from this body, providers face a nearly four-year gap in rate adjustments—putting us right back in the crisis we just emerged from.

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

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

Investing in DD services is not just about providers—it's about ensuring Ohioans with disabilities receive the care and support they need to live full, independent lives in their communities. We look forward to working with you to build on the progress you've made and keep Ohio moving forward.

Thank you again for the opportunity and privilege to bring my concerns before you and if I can ever be of any help in this process, please let me know.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cora Denning', with a stylized, flowing script.

Cora Denning

[cdenning@iopci.org](mailto:cdenning@iopci.org)