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**Testimony on SFY 26/27 Operating Budget
Senate Finance Committee**

Chairman Cirino, Vice-Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and esteemed committee members,

I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Stephen Colecchi, and I have the honor of serving as CEO of the Hattie Larlham Center for Children with Disabilities.

Hattie Larlham has a long and proud history of providing support and services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. From our humble beginnings in 1961 when Hattie and Richard Larlham opened their farmhouse on Diagonal Road in Mantua, Ohio to provide care to a disabled newborn, Hattie Larlham now provides services to over 1,600 individuals at 70+ locations across Northeast and Central Ohio.

Hattie Larlham operates as a not-for-profit organization and is one of the largest providers of services to individuals with disabilities in the State of Ohio. We provide a full range of services including residential service at six Intermediate Care Facilities (ICFs) and over sixty Supported Living and Waiver Homes in Northeast and Central Ohio. We operate seven Adult Day Program locations and provide a wide range of Employment Services designed to help people with disabilities on their employment journeys. The Dahlberg Gibson Learning Center is Hattie Larlham's innovative early intervention program for infants, toddlers, and preschool-age children with intellectual and developmental disabilities living in Franklin County.

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:

- Decrease employee vacancies from 32% to 17%, improving access to care for individuals with disabilities.
- Reduce employee turnover from 37% to 24%, stabilizing our workforce and improving continuity of care.

- Increase in the number of applicants, allowing us to fill critical positions and provide more reliable services.
- Reduce overtime costs, which are necessary for coverage but are not reimbursed by Medicaid.
- Expand services to vent-dependent residents meeting a need across Ohio and resulting in significant savings to Medicaid.

The staffing crisis has impacted all our programs, but I would like to focus my testimony on our flagship location, the Hattie Larlham Center for Children with Disabilities. The Hattie Larlham Center is a 124 bed licensed ICF. We currently have 123 individuals living at the Center who have significant medical issues in addition to their intellectual or developmental disabilities. The Center is a unique and special facility with outstanding and dedicated employees, providing long term support and care to the people we serve.

Without question, the backbone of any DD provider is its employees. The Hattie Larlham Center relies on Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), Registered Nurses, Licensed Practical Nurses, Respiratory Therapists, Physical Therapists, and other staff to meet the complex needs of our residents.

To get a better sense of the individuals who rely on us for their support and care, I would like to share with you information about the residents at the Center.

- Twenty-five of the residents are on ventilator support around the clock.
- 100% of the residents are incontinent.
- 100% of the residents are non-ambulatory.
- All but two of the residents are non-verbal.
- Eleven of the residents are blind; and seventy-five are visually impaired.
- 83% of the residents are fed through a feeding tube only; and another 8% are fed a combination of oral feeding and tube feeding.

These numbers clearly demonstrate that the Center is the permanent home for the residents who reside there. If we are not here to meet their needs – who will?

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 direct support professional 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.

We collectively have the responsibility to make sure that sufficient funding is provided to pay our employees an acceptable hourly rate and allow us to compete for employees and address our staffing needs and most importantly, to meet the needs of our fellow Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities. These folks rely on all of us, and we cannot let them down.

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.

Sincerely,



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