



**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 Elizabeth Jones, and I am the Director of Community Programs for ARC Industries. Our organization has supported individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Franklin County since 1963. Our team of 235 employees is proud to deliver a robust array of adult day programming and career service options to nearly 1,300 Ohioans annually, as providers for The Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) and Vocational Rehabilitation under Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD).

First, I want to express our deep gratitude for the much-needed investment in developmental 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:

- Expand services to individuals we previously had to turn away due to staffing shortages, including increasing employment readiness services for transition-age youth by 242%.
- Increase wages, with our current average Direct Support Professional (DSP) wage at \$18.00 per hour.
- Reduce turnover to 33%, stabilizing our workforce and improving continuity of care.

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.

I have dedicated 20 years to working in the Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (ID/DD) field, a profession that holds deep personal meaning for me. During the last staffing crisis, I

witnessed firsthand the devastating impact of underfunding—individuals who depended on essential support were left without it, while compassionate and skilled colleagues were forced to leave the field simply because their wages couldn't sustain the cost of living. It was a heartbreaking time. We cannot allow ourselves to return to that reality.

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

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

Investing in these 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.

Respectfully submitted,



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