



Creating pathways for individuals with disabilities to engage in the community, achieve greater independence, and attain employment.

May 29, 2025

**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 in writing.

My name is Susie Barragate and I am the President & CEO of Vocational Guidance Services, a 135-year-old nonprofit organization that serves Ohioans with disabilities. VGS is headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio and provides services in Cuyahoga, Franklin, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, and Mahoning Counties. We provide adult day services, vocational rehabilitation programming, work training and experiences, job placement, summer youth work experiences, and community engagement opportunities administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) and Vocational Rehabilitation Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD). Our team of 91 employees are proud to provide essential services to more than 770 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

On behalf of VGS and the individuals we serve, 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 for an increase in wages, we have been able to retain staff and had an increase in our number of applicants. We have also been able to implement quality measures including performance management software and training programs.

Furthermore, thank you to Governor DeWine and Director Hauck for honoring the commitment made in the last General Assembly by using General Revenue Funds to maintain the rate increases that were funded in part with ARPA dollars. This investment provides much-needed stability for providers like VGS and we 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, I 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 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 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 voice the concerns of VGS, other disability providers, and Ohioans with disabilities and their families and caregivers.

Please reach out with any questions or more information.

Sincerely,



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