



Kerstin Sjoberg, President and CEO of Disability Rights Ohio
Interested Party Testimony on House Bill 96
Senate Finance Committee
June 6, 2025

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written-only interested party testimony in consideration of House Bill 96 (HB 96), the state operating budget. Disability Rights Ohio (DRO) is the state's protection and advocacy (p&a) system that advocates for people with disabilities in Ohio.

DRO would like to highlight three (3) provisions in the substitute version of HB 96 and one (1) amendment not included in this version of the bill:

- 1. Group VIII Trigger Language and Transition Plan;**
- 2. DeafBlind Fund Elimination;**
- 3. Removal of the \$20,000 Unearned Income for Medicaid Buy-in for Workers with Disabilities; and**
- 4. Support Inclusion of amendment SC0906.**

GROUP VIII POPULATION TRIGGER LANGUAGE AND TRANSITION PLAN

Sub HB 96 maintains language to eliminate coverage for over 700,000 Ohioans if the federal government reduces their federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP) below 90%. While the House included §333.360 that would require a phased transition plan that would allow individuals the opportunity to find new insurance coverage and time for the state to transition individuals off of the Medicaid program, concerns remain about the effectiveness of this plan and the need to maintain coverage to these individuals under the Medicaid program.

Currently, 47% of adults enrolled in Ohio Medicaid bill for behavioral health services. Ohio's mental health system is already straining resources, has limited capacity, and the ability to access care is limited. By cutting access to behavioral health coverage for this population, the state is reducing access to needed services and supports. The Governor has made clear his vision to expand access to behavioral health services and improve access to healthcare. Eliminating

medical coverage for over 700,000 Ohioans if the FMAP were to fall even 1%, would not be meeting that vision.

DEAFBLIND FUND

Sub HB 96 removes the DeafBlind Fund from the Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities agency budget. This \$100,000 line item is critical for ensuring DeafBlind Ohioans can live independently in their communities. The DeafBlind Fund was established in the previous biennial budget and has been successful for DeafBlind Ohioans. The DeafBlind Fund is used for Support Service Providers (SSP) or CoNavigators. The program has allowed DeafBlind individuals to function independently doing daily tasks. Restoring this funding is necessary to continue the positive outcomes of the DeafBlind supports made possible through this line item.

REMOVAL OF \$20,000 UNEARNED INCOME FOR MEDICAID BUY-IN FOR WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES PROVISION

Sub HB 96 removes a provision included by the House that would allow individuals with disabilities receiving Medicaid through Medicaid Buy-In for Workers with Disabilities (MBIWD) to disregard \$20,000 of their unearned income when determining benefits. People with disabilities currently make up a larger percentage of unemployed at 7.2% of the population, but an even larger share of the population not in the labor force at 75%. This is due to several factors including physical barriers to employment, benefit cliffs, and a lack of accommodations in the workplace. Removing this ability to keep people in the workforce by disregarding \$20,000 of an individual's unearned income will further exacerbate the low employment rate of people with disabilities. Keeping benefits while working is necessary especially as many services people with disabilities rely on are only available through the Medicaid program. The Senate reinstating this provision will help to ensure access to employment for disabled Ohioans.

INCLUDE AMENDMENT HC0688

DRO supports SC0906, a proposed amendment that would create the “community projects” line item of \$4,716,000 that would be allocated for Community Response Pilot Programs targeted in three different sized counties, municipalities, and/or townships. The goal of this pilot program would be to help divert crisis calls from 9-1-1, establish community response teams, and coordinate long-term care for individuals.

The Community Response Pilot Program provides new funding to communities that would not otherwise be available. This allows communities to create the response services needed while continuing to focus on public safety. The Community Response Pilot Program will allow communities to collaborate across criminal justice, human services, and housing agencies focusing on the needs of the individual and community. The data collected from the Community Response Pilot Program will allow for long-term expansion of the program and establishing statewide systems of response to better address the needs of Ohioans experiencing a crisis.

DRO appreciates the Senate's time and attention to HB 96 but further changes need to be made to make this a budget that works for Ohioans with disabilities. As the Senate works on the final omnibus package it is critical to consider the vital programs that are provided to people with disabilities in our state. The Senate should make every effort to ensure access to Medicaid expansion, MBIWD, SSPs, and community response.

DRO appreciates your time and consideration of this written-only interested party testimony for Sub HB 96. If you have any questions or wish to discuss these issues further, do not hesitate to reach out to Jordan Ballinger, Policy Director at jballinger@disabilityrightsohio.org or (614) 466-7264 x135.