

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

Good Afternoon, Chair Romanchuk, Vice-Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Senate Medicaid Committee.

Thank you for letting me speak to you today.

My name is **Celeste Ferguson**. I serve on the OhioRISE Family and Member Advisory Council. I am the mother of Shabbo, who receives Home and Community-Based (HCBS) services through Ohio's Individual Options waiver. I'm here to talk about why it's so important to keep investing in these services — and especially in the Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) who make them possible.

When Shabbo first got her waiver, we were hopeful. We believed it would finally mean that she could be supported safely and consistently in our home. But that wasn't what happened. We couldn't find a provider who had enough staff to deliver the care she needed. The few staff that were available often left after just a few weeks — the turnover was constant. There was no consistency, no stability, and no way to build trust.

Because of this, Shabbo's health and well-being declined. She ended up being hospitalized and moved through multiple short- and long-term placements outside of our home. None of those placements were the right fit — and all of them struggled with the same issue: they couldn't find or keep qualified DSPs, because the wages were too low.

Fast forward to today, and things are finally better. Shabbo now lives in an independent living setting with 24/7 support from an agency provider. The only reason this is working is because DSPs are earning higher wages than before — not high enough, but better. For the first time in years, she has consistent, qualified people in her life. People she trusts. People who show up. And that has made all the difference.

But even now, the situation is fragile. If DSP wages do not increase for three or more years, we will lose the progress we've made. If the workforce crisis returns, so will the instability, the hospital stays, and the high-cost placements that we know do not work for Shabbo or others like her.

Please don't let that happen again.

I ask you to:

1. Include a rate increase for DSPs in waiver settings.
2. Create a system to regularly adjust pay, so we don't face this crisis again.

April 29, 2025

Testimony

These services — and the people who provide them — are essential. Shabbo's stability and quality of life depend on it. So do thousands of others across Ohio.

Thank you for listening and thank you for your leadership.

Celeste Ferguson

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