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**Senate Medicaid Committee
Substitute House Bill 96
Cleveland Hearing and Speech Center
Community Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Christa Abood, Board Member and Client Mother
May 6, 2025**

Chairman Romanchuk, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Senate Medicaid Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Christa Abood and I am a proud board member of the Cleveland Hearing and Speech Center, home to one of Ohio's seven Community Centers for the Deaf. But more importantly, I'm the mother of a remarkable young man, Noah, who was diagnosed with hearing loss at the age of four.

When we first learned of his diagnosis, we were overwhelmed, uncertain of what his future would look like, and fearful of the challenges that lay ahead. But we were determined to give him every opportunity to thrive. From that moment on, I became his advocate in school, in healthcare settings, and in the community. I made sure he had access to the resources, support, and understanding he needed.

The Cleveland Hearing and Speech Center has been with us every step of the way. They provided early intervention, helped us navigate the educational system, and offered ongoing support throughout his childhood and adolescence. They helped him find his voice, both literally and figuratively.

Today, my son is living independently, working successfully in sales, and preparing to get married this fall. His journey has not been without its challenges, but he has met them with strength, resilience, and a community that believed in him.

Because of the Cleveland Hearing and Speech Center and other Community Centers for the Deaf across Ohio, families like mine have hope. These centers are lifelines. They provide vital services, advocacy, and education that promote independence and inclusion.

I continue to give back by serving on the Center's board of directors. I'm also learning sign language and am a proud member of the Cleveland Community Sign Choir! I do this because I believe connection and communication should never be barriers to opportunity.

I strongly urge you to support an appropriation of \$800,000 each fiscal year for Ohio's Community Centers for the Deaf. These funds are not just an investment in programs—they are an investment in people, in futures, and in communities across our state.

Thank you for your time and your consideration.