



THE SOCIETY FOR HANDICAPPED CITIZENS  
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**Testimony on SFY 26/27 Operating Budget  
Senate Medicaid Committee**

Chairman Romanchuk, Vice-Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Liston, and esteemed committee members,

I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Shelly Wharton and I am the Executive Director of The Society for Handicapped Citizens of Medina County, Inc., we are headquartered in Seville and serve individuals in Medina, Ashland, Huron and Wayne counties. We provide residential care in intermediate care facilities and waiver settings, adult day services, non-medical transportation and employment services for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities] administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). Our team of 160 employees are proud to provide essential services to approximately 200 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In addition, we also provide free Ombudsman services and People Together – an educational program to 3<sup>rd</sup> graders about all types of disabilities.

First, 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, we have been able to:

- Increase applicants, allowing us to fill critical positions and provide more reliable services.
- Reduce overtime costs, which are necessary for coverage but are not reimbursed by Medicaid.
- Implement quality measures, such as [specific program, staff training, technology improvement, etc.].
- Increase wages, with our current average Direct Support Professional (DSP) wage at \$22.78 per hour (this does not include benefits, solely compensation).

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.

To ensure Ohioans with disabilities and their families have access to the care they need, **we 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 waiver providers** to keep up with inflation and workforce demands.
- 3. Establish a mechanism for ongoing 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.

Kind regards,



Shelly Wharton

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