



HELP Foundation, Inc
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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 Tamara Honkala and I am the President & CEO of HELP Foundation, Inc., we are headquartered in Euclid, Ohio and serve Cuyahoga, Lake, Summit and Lorain Counties. We provide residential, day support, vocational and summer education programs for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) and Vocational Rehabilitation under Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (ODD). Our team of 204 employees are proud to provide essential services to 543 Ohioans with 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:

- Decrease vacancies by 65%, improving access to care for individuals with disabilities.
- Reduce turnover from 108% to 68%, stabilizing our workforce and improving continuity of care.
- Increase applicants, allowing us to fill critical positions and provide more reliable services.
- Reduce overtime costs by \$281,300, which are necessary for coverage but are not reimbursed by Medicaid.
- Expand services to individuals we previously had to turn away due to staffing shortages.
- Increase wages, with our current average Direct Support Professional (DSP) wage at \$17 per hour.

Serving individuals to reach their full ability

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.

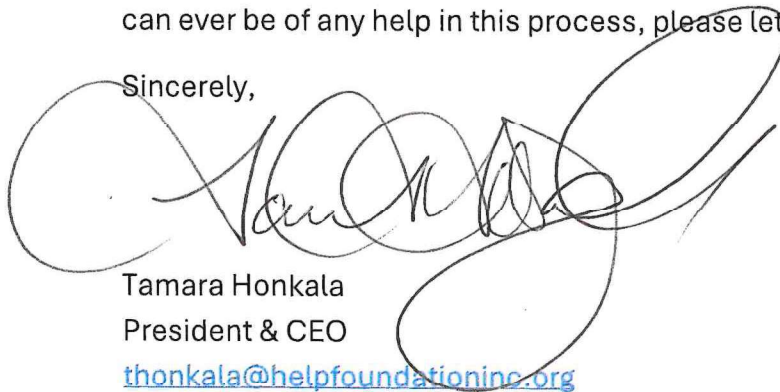
To ensure Ohioans with disabilities and their families have access to the care they need, **we urge the General Assembly to:**

- 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.

Sincerely,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tamara Honkala', is written over the typed name and contact information.

Tamara Honkala
President & CEO

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