



## Testimony on SFY 26/27 Operating Budget

Dear Senate Medicaid Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding Ohio House Bill 96.

My name is Tim Neville, and I have the privilege of serving as President and CEO of Echoing Hills, a non-profit organization that has provided care and support to individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities for almost 60 years. What started as a summer camp program has evolved into residential, recreational, adult services, and educational programs throughout Ohio. We exist to create opportunities for individuals to know and experience Jesus Christ, revolutionizing the lives of those we serve where they live, learn, connect, play, and worship.

I want to start by expressing my gratitude for the investment in Developmental Disability services in the last state budget. Thanks to Governor DeWine, Director Hauck, and your support, we were able to reinvest in our team members. For Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) at Echoing Hills, this meant going from earning an average of \$16.94/hour to \$19.15/hour, a 13% increase. Since this time, I have heard from several employees about what this means to them. I would like to share a few of their quotes with you.

*"The increase made my life easier by being able to sleep not worrying if I could afford my own medications."* (Carol B.)

*"I was able to buy a used car to get back and forth from work. I'm very grateful for that."* (David P.)

*"I can help meet more of my mom's needs as she is on a tight budget."* (Angela G.)

*"It really helped my family. We no longer had to worry about the cost of food or other things that had gone up in cost. It was very much appreciated."* (Jess H.)

As you can see, our team members not only support those we serve at Echoing Hills, but they also care for their families. The increase helped with everyday expenses like transportation, medications, and groceries. For many, this allowed them to stay in the career they love rather than find something that paid more but was less fulfilling.

In 2024, we saw a rise in staff retention – 75% across the organization. In some of our regions, we saw an increase of up to 17%. These impressive numbers are directly correlated to the investment in our employees thanks to the state budget increase in 2023.

As I look ahead, I can see that additional funding is needed. The current budget does not include the ability to further increase DSP wages for Waiver services. This is necessary due to the continued workforce crisis and rising costs of goods and services. Without continued support, I fear those who work in the Developmental Disability services field may find other entry-level employment that pays more than we are able to offer. This turnover would, in turn, have devastating effects on those we are entrusted to serve.

Your continued investment in Developmental Disability services ensures Ohioans with disabilities receive the support they depend on. It allows organizations like ours to recruit and retain the proper staff, building relationships and trust between them and those they serve. These relationships allow individuals to receive quality care and services - living independent lives filled with choice, dignity, and fulfillment.

I urge you to maintain the Governor's current investment in Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with Intellectual / Developmental Disabilities (ICFs), include a rate increase for Waiver providers, and establish a mechanism for ongoing increases for Waiver services. These decisions have a profound impact on individuals with disabilities, their families and guardians, and those entrusted to provide for their care and support needs.

Additionally, Echoing Hills is supporting the State Budget ICF Equipment Ceiling Amendment #SC0294. We serve people in intermediate care facilities, and to do this well, ICFs need equipment like wheelchair-accessible vans, medical beds, lifts, and other tools that help people live safely and be part of their communities. Right now, there's a spending limit (called a "ceiling") on how much help ICFs can get paying for this equipment. Unfortunately, this limit hasn't changed since 2017. As you are aware, everything costs much more now. As an example, vans used to cost \$54,000; today, it's over \$85,000! Given that anything over \$500 counts as capital, and with prices higher, we have many more things counting toward our limit, like beds, chairs, and computers, resulting in our ceiling being hit much quicker and not leaving room for necessities. We are asking you to raise the equipment ceiling. It is extremely important, and it is overdue in order to keep up with the rising costs.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide written testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



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