



REM Ohio  
470 Portage Lakes Drive  
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Akron, OH 44319

## **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 Buffie LaBelle and I am a Regional Director of REM Ohio. We are headquartered in Akron and provide services in roughly 45 counties across the state. We provide Intermediate Care Facilities for people with I/DD, as well as residential services in licensed and unlicensed homes, supported living services, Ohio Shared Living service, Day and Community Integration, and Vocational services administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). Our team of 1100 employees are proud to provide essential services to 1000 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental 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.
- 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 \$18 per hour.

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.



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