

**Testimony on SFY 26/27 Operating Budget
Senate Medicaid Committee**

Chairman Romanchuk, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and for your steadfast leadership in ensuring that Ohioans with developmental disabilities have access to the care and support they need to thrive.

My name is Michelle L. Madden, and I have the privilege of serving as CEO of Epic. For more than 50 years, we've worked alongside individuals with developmental disabilities and their families across multiple counties—building not only services, but a sense of *community and belonging.

When I last testified, I spoke with the weight of exhaustion. Our team had been stretched to the edge, doing everything in our power to meet essential needs. But thanks to your courageous and thoughtful action during the last budget cycle, we were able to take our first real step toward recovery. You didn't just invest in programs—you invested in people. And that investment began to transform lives.

Because of your support, we've been able to reopen critical services, increase wages for our Direct Support Professionals to an average of \$20 per hour, and start to rebuild a workforce that had been in crisis for over a decade. We are deeply grateful to Governor DeWine and Director Hauck for honoring the General Assembly's commitment by maintaining those rate increases using GRF funds.

These changes have brought real progress. But that progress is still vulnerable.

Turnover remains unacceptably high, and the need for services continues to grow, especially for people with complex support needs. Every week, we receive requests for help that we cannot fulfill, and families continue to wait.

At Epic, we believe in the power of transformation, not just maintaining a system, but evolving it. With support from ARPA funding through DODD, we've adopted innovative solutions such as Nobi smart sensors, the Resilience Model of Care, and the HealthCare Safety International software platform. These tools allow us to improve health and safety outcomes, provide real-time alerts, and reduce administrative burden, creating more space for authentic, human connections.

Technology isn't a luxury—it's a pathway to greater efficiency, dignity, and independence.

It helps our staff focus on the things that matter most: building trust, nurturing relationships, and fostering a true sense of belonging for those we serve.

But none of this is sustainable without the people who make it possible. Our Direct Support Professionals are the heartbeat of our mission. They deserve wages and working conditions that reflect the depth of their contribution to this community. Reform must center the workforce—because without them, there is no care, no connection, no transformation.

With that in mind, we respectfully urge this committee to:

1. Maintain the Governor's investments in ICFs, Multi-System Youth, and Technology First.
2. Include a rate increase for waiver providers to keep pace with inflation and workforce demands.
3. Establish a structure for ongoing, predictable rate adjustments that prevent future funding crises.

This is about more than budgets. It's about being thoughtful stewards of the kind of Ohio we all want to live in—where everyone, regardless of ability, is supported, valued, and connected to community.

Thank you again for your time, your leadership, and your commitment to action that reflects the values we share. I'm honored to answer any questions or support this work in any way I can.

Respectfully and With Optimism,

Michelle L. Madden, CEO

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