

Good morning Chairman and members of the committee.

My name is Jeana Campolo. I have been a direct care worker at the Mount Vernon Developmental for 15 years. I appreciate the opportunity to speak here today on behalf of the individuals with severe and profound disabilities that I serve every day at this state-operated center.

Chairman Smith, members of this committee, I am here today to speak in support of the state's ten Developmental Centers and against the closures of Montgomery and Youngstown Developmental Centers where individuals with severe developmental disabilities live. Usually, when I testify I talk about our services and our precious individuals who need them so desperately. But today I want to call your attention to something a little different. I am here today to ask that you support caregivers like myself and those at the two centers, and recognize the value we bring to the DD system.

It's practically unheard of in the disabilities system to have direct care workers with 15 or 20 or 25 years of experience like me and my colleagues do. It's unheard of. Parents would die to have their child taken care of by somebody for this amount of time. It's like the gold standard. But closing these two facilities means the most experienced staff in the entire system will be fending for their jobs now and that continuity of care will be broken.

Not only is it unfair to the individuals and families and to employees, it has the affect of ratcheting down the wages, compensation and experience level of all employees in the DD system. That has longer-term implications for the system. We know lower wages leads to high turnover, which in turn, can have dangerous outcomes for individuals.

I consider myself a professional in my field. I am a single parent with one child in college at Ohio University and another one in high school. I am a volunteer in my community. I volunteer at Interchurch Social Services, Food for the Hungry and Turn the Tide, all organizations in my Mount Vernon community. I have been able to sustain my family and pursue things like college for my child and volunteering in my community, because I make a family-sustaining wage and have affordable benefits.

Wages in the DD system for direct care staff average \$10 an hour. That's why the turnover is so high – from 40 to 75 percent annually. But the state's direct care staff averages closer to \$16-\$17 an hour and includes affordable health care. Consequently, turnover in the DCs is quite small – more like 10 percent. And that's an important difference when you're talking about individuals who need continuity, consistency, structure and pattern.

In fact, during the Applecreek and Springview closures DODD was quick to try to recruit state staff to take jobs in waiver homes or to become independent providers, which I'm sure they'll be trying to do again. But the wages are so low, employees

can't sustain a family on them. In our view, the state has already cultivated a workforce that they should honor and protect.

Now, obviously, something like a closure will affect the individuals we care for the most. No doubt about it. They're fragile and change is the very thing that causes setbacks and behaviors. But I think it's also worth discussing what happens to your skilled workforce and the state investment in these employees. That also needs to be protected.

Not only are employees at the DC the gold standard in the DD system, this workforce has not been afraid to adapt to change. We knew that the DCs were going to have a changing role in the system. We knew we were getting smaller. We knew we were going to be receiving the kinds of individuals who were more challenging, the ones that others couldn't take care of. And that's what has happened. The DCs get mostly court probates now, or adult offenders and individuals with dual diagnoses who have multiple challenges. We changed. We adapted. We scaled back. We got new training. We've done all the things we're supposed to do. But now it feels a little like the rug is being pulled out from under us, in spite of our willingness to change.

For example, as we adapt to changing times, we have pushed and pushed the state to offer a fuller array of services, so our staff can "follow the work" and so the entire DD system can benefit by having highly trained and fairly compensated workers. Offering a fuller array would also mean increased continuity of care for individuals transitioning from our DCs, who would have the benefit of staying with their same caregivers.

But the state has opposed our proposal. So in our view, it's the administration that's entrenched in the old way of doing things, not us. It's the state that appears to be resisting change.

Today we're asking you to please stop these closures. Not only have we already reduced the DC capacity by nearly 50 percent in just about 6 years, but we are in the middle of a housing crisis in the DD system. There is no where for our fragile individuals to go. Please help us keep DCs a choice for families in Youngstown and Dayton.

I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.