

William "Monty" Blanton
1582 Mt. Carmel Road
Vinton, OH 45686
740-645-3025

Thank you Chairman Smith, Vice Chair Schuring and Ranking Member Driehaus for allowing me to testify in front of the House Finance Committee today.

My name is Monty Blanton. I am here as a private citizen but also as a former state employee, retired five years ago. I worked at the Gallipolis Developmental Center for individuals with developmental disabilities for 31 and a half years. I now work in the Gallipolis area as a field staff for OCSEA representing state employees in many different agencies.

I am here today to ask that you stop the closures of Youngstown and Montgomery Developmental Centers (DCs) and that you continue to allow DCs to remain an option for families in 10 areas of the state.

A decision to disrupt the lives of more than 170 individuals and more than 400 staff should never be done in haste or in secret. The sudden announcement of these closures last month, stunned entire communities, and caught families and staff by surprise. There was absolutely no stakeholder input on these closures. Not a single parent or elected official or legislator or community member was consulted. In fact, parents had been told these last four years, that instead of closures, the state was simply going to make the developmental centers smaller. Which they did. They've been downsized by a stunning 40 percent in four years. In fact, that reduction is more than the national average. The administration has indicated for years that the downsizing would happen *instead* of closures.

Now, here we are, the old bait and switch.

I'm extremely disappointed that as the families give testimony, groups like DRO have brought out individuals to testify against the DCs. Typically, these were typically people who have never been in a DC, would never be admitted to a DC, and some of whom have no developmental disability at all, only a physical one. Shame on DRO for causing these families such trauma by advocating for eliminating their loved one's home. How can any advocacy group promote one group of people and throw the other group under the bus?

Do you know how difficult it is to get into a Developmental Center? It has to be extreme circumstances on top of having to be court probated. It's practically impossible to have a loved one placed in a DC today. Often you can't get in, even if you meet the criteria. It's not allowed, period. Parents

spend months, sometimes years failing over and over and over in a waiver setting before DODD will allow them access to a DC. And then it's just for short term stabilization. So to falsely present the DCs as facilities that are warehousing people and locking them up is just outright untrue.

In my 20 something years of advocating for the DCs, I have never seen such polarization within the DD community as I do now and I'm saddened by it. The DC family and staff that are here today are not advocating for the elimination of private ICF/DDs. Nor are we calling for curbing Home and Community Based Waivers. We all agree that we need to build capacity in the DD system, not eliminate it. We all agree there's a housing crisis. We believe in the full spectrum of care and that there is a place in the system for DCs, for private ICFs, for waivers and supported living. This should not be a one-size-fits-all system. It should be a choice.

But unfortunately, some misguided advocates want individuals in the DCs to pay for waiver expansion, by eliminating the DCs as an option of care. But we don't need to Rob Peter to Pay Paul. It's not necessary. Even Director Martin said no money would be saved this biennium by the DC closures.

Such a big decision as a closure needs the input of the people it affects the most. Parents and families who have chosen public or private ICFs as well as the caregivers we represent, have been excluded from nearly every major meeting and decision this administration has made on DD issues. A strategic plan was completed without input from parents or caregivers that calls for the elimination of all DCs. This closure decision was made without their input, too. Decisions are being made in secret, behind closed doors and now you have rooms full of angry parents at the Statehouse who want some answers. We are hoping that you can help give that to them.

We need to make the process of these announced closures more transparent and allow parents, stakeholders, local elected officials, businesses and concerned community members to have a stake and input into the process.

It's true I worked at one of the Developmental Centers that isn't closing for more than 30 years. But once the state starts down this road, where does it end? Will Gallipolis Developmental Center be next? We've downsized and right-sized and made necessary changes. When is enough, enough? I strongly urge you to help us keep all 10 Developmental Centers open.

I am happy to take any questions you have.

