

## **H.B. 483 – Mid-Biennium Review Testimony**

Gary Smith, Director of Finance and Operations  
Licking County Board of Developmental Disabilities  
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Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Driehaus, and Members of the House Finance Committee, my name is Gary Smith and I am the Director of Finance and Operations for the Licking County Board of Developmental Disabilities. I also serve as the Vice-chair of the Business Managers Organization of County Boards of Developmental Disabilities.

*I am testifying today to ask for your support of an amendment to HB483 that would provide flexibility to county boards of developmental disabilities by stabilizing and streamlining county DD levy funding streams.*

County Boards of Developmental Disabilities ("county boards") are the primary funders of services for people with developmental disabilities in Ohio. Each year, approximately \$1 billion is raised through voter-approved property tax levies to fund DD services. A substantial portion of these funds is passed through the state to draw down additional federal Medicaid dollars, further amplifying local taxpayers' ability to ensure all members of their community can live happy, healthy, and fulfilling lives.

In order to ensure the wishes of local voters are carried out, it is imperative that boards have the ability to plan how they will pay for these services and supports over the long term. Recently, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has directed the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) to help county boards transition from being providers of DD services to solely being administrators and funders of DD services. As boards make this transition, having flexibility in their levy language requests will be key in two areas; 1) length of term of the levy; and 2) ballot language that outlines the intended use of the particular levy.

To illustrate the need for these changes, I will use my county board as an example. The Licking County Board of Developmental Disabilities currently has two levies in place; a 1 mill, five-year levy and a 1.6 mill continuing term levy. The 1 mill levy is due to expire at the end of 2016 (with collection through 2017). The voters of Licking County have been supportive of the board's past seven levy attempts for renewals, replacements, and additional millage. However, the board's current levy structure requires the board to return to voters for support a minimum of every five years. With this new mandate from the federal government, our board must now make decisions that will have implications lasting far longer than five years. More so than ever before, our number one priority is creating a stable financial structure to ensure the board can continue supporting people with developmental disabilities well into the future. As it currently stands, this is far more difficult than it has to be under state law.

Ohio's developmental disability levies are unique in that we have the authority to go to the ballot from two separate Revised Code Sections, 5705.19 and 5705.222. Our amendment request would modernize state law to reflect the realities of DD policy changes at the state and federal levels, as well as standardize levy language across both areas of statute to ensure that county boards can create stable, predictable funding streams for services in accordance with the wishes of local taxpayers.

First, boards that originally passed levies under ORC 5705.19 are limited to a period of five-years in length, at which time the levy may only be replaced or renewed for another five-year period. Should a board not be successful in passing the levy, funding for the county board ceases. However, levies passed under ORC 5705.222 have the ability to change the length of the levy without running a new levy, so long as the terms of the levy (i.e., how the money will be used) are not changed. We respectfully request that ORC 5705.19 be amended to have the same flexibility as ORC 5705.222, thereby allowing county boards to change the length of existing levies to be no longer than 10-years or as a continuing levy without running the proposal as a new levy request.

Secondly, county board levies often refer to specific names of programs and buildings where the county board has historically provided services. As county boards transition direct services to private providers, those programs and buildings will no longer be used, yet the county will continue to fund and oversee the same services, albeit in a new location through third party entities. Because levies will continue to fund the exact same services that voters have come to expect, only provided in a different manner, boards need the flexibility to change existing levy language to more accurately describe how the funds will be used without creating a new levy request. Therefore, we are requesting that changes be made to ORC 5705.19 and ORC 5705.222 to permit county boards to make the necessary changes to existing levy language without requiring boards to ask voters in their counties to approve new levies to continue funding existing services.

It is important to note that neither of these requests require any state funds to implement (i.e., they are budget neutral). County boards simply seek a practical remedy that will ensure long-term funding to support a system that has been the backbone of services and supports for people with developmental disabilities in Ohio for the past half-century. Individuals served by county boards and their families depend on county boards for essential services – these requested changes provide the means and the flexibility for boards to continue doing so for the foreseeable future.

Given all of the changes going on within Ohio's developmental disabilities system today, I respectfully request that you provide county boards with the means to sustain a stable fiscal environment by including our amendment in HB483.

Thank you for your time today. I welcome any questions you may have.