



Testimony on House Bill 49

Ohio Senate Finance Committee
Senator Scott Oeslager, Chair
Sen. Gayle Manning, Co-Chair
Sen. Michael Skindell, Ranking Minority Member

Sara Kline, Board Chair, Autism Society Greater Akron

Chairman Oeslager, Co-Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell and Members of the Committee:

My name is Sara Kline and I am the Mayor of Stow, and, more importantly, the proud mother of Lindsay, my 18 year-old-daughter who lives with autism. I am also the Chairperson of the Board of Directors for the Autism Society of Greater Akron and am here today to testify on behalf of that organization, as well as the six other Autism Society of America affiliates throughout Ohio.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today about the 17,000 people who live with autism in the Autism Society of Greater Akron's five county service territory, which includes Summit, Stark, Portage, Medina and Wayne Counties, in addition to the 150,000 people with autism who live in our great state.

The Autism Society respectfully requests that the Senate Finance Committee reconsider the proposed budget passed by the House, HB 49, because of the disproportional impact cuts to Medicaid would have on people with developmental disabilities, including those with autism.

I do not have to tell you that Medicaid is the life line for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. I do not even have to tell you that it provides financial and medical support for some 470,000 individuals with disabilities in Ohio. What I need to tell you is what that looks like to those individuals and their families on a day-to-day basis. Let me share some stories of what Medicaid does for all people with disabilities who want to be included in our community and depend on Medicaid to do so.

Lindsay is the proud graduate of Stow High School. As a student with a developmental disability, she is eligible to attend high school until she is 22, but Lindsay has decided to attend for just one more year as she develops her work skills at Kent State University's non-degree seeking program for people with intellectual disabilities. Like other teenage girls, she has BFF's, texts on her phone too much, and wants to someday live in her own apartment.

Lindsay is also non-verbal, will never drive, and right now, can only be on her own for a limited time. As parents, we all have to eventually let go. We have to let go because it's what all parents have to do, even if our child is developmentally not able to take the traditional path toward adulthood. In order for her father and I to let go, Lindsay will need support as an adult beyond what we can provide on a day-to-day basis.

In order to pay for her medical needs after she no longer is on my health insurance, Lindsay will need Medicaid. It also pays for job coaches, transportation, habilitative care, and in-home support, allowing her to live as independently as possible. It is very possible for Lindsay to become a taxpaying citizen and live on her own, and continue making progress in her daily living skills, but she will need Medicaid as the primary financial mechanism to support her.

The culture of Ohio is that we take care of our own. We pull ourselves up by our boot straps and we work hard to achieve our goals. Our Buckeye State takes pride in what we have given our country: seven U.S. Presidents, two brothers who taught America how to fly, the first American to orbit the earth, buckeye candy, the national football champions, and soon to be the two time champions of the NBA. As LeBron James says, in Akron, we believe that "nothing is given, everything is earned, you work for what you have."

We believe in paying our taxes and taking out the garbage, as my husband says. We want all of those things for Lindsay and others that she represents today...all people living with developmental disabilities who want to lead a life with dignity and respect and living the American dream.

But she and the other 150,000 people living with disabilities today need you, as members of this committee and the entire General Assembly, to provide greater support for Medicaid, or Lindsay, and people like her, will not have the safety net in place to achieve independence - the dream we all have for all of our children.

We are asking that you:

- Support provisions in the governor's proposed budget that help people with autism and other intellectual disabilities lead productive lives.
- Support pay increases for direct care providers who currently make minimum wage to care for one of our most vulnerable populations.
- Protect against cuts to an already lean program forcing reductions in service that would put the health and well-being of people with autism at significant risk.
- Promote the development of legislation consistent with the goals of personal choice, personal responsibility, integration, and independence.
- Support the Federal Medicaid Expansion that has benefited some 417,000 Ohioans with disabilities and work against bureaucratic barriers that hurt access to this critical program.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

The Autism Society of Ohio (ASO) is a statewide affiliate of the Autism Society of America. It is a coalition of the local Ohio affiliates (Greater Akron, Central Ohio, Greater Cincinnati, Greater Cleveland, Mahoning Valley, and Northwest Ohio). ASO's mission is to "improve the lives of all affected by autism," and focuses its efforts on advocating for individuals with autism, their families and those who work with them. ASO also serves as a resource for information and support in areas where our local affiliates do not cover, mainly rural communities. ASO's mission is to "improve the lives of all affected by autism", with a focus on advocacy and autism awareness across the state. ASO also serves as a resource for information, programming and support in areas not served by a local affiliate.

For additional information, please contact:

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