



Ohio Senate
Finance Committee
June 5, 2019

Chairperson Dolan and Esteemed Senate Finance Committee Members,

I am Tony Thomas, am writing to provide testimony on behalf of Welcome House, Inc., where I have served as its Executive Director since 1999. With me today is our Associate Executive Director, Mrs. Megan Nachtwey. Our agency serves 220 persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. We employ over 400 staff with most of this staff (375) being Direct Support Professionals. (DSP's). We operate 47 group homes in Cuyahoga County and are the second largest provider in our County. We opened the first small community group home for men in Cuyahoga County in 1981. It took our founding families from 1972-1981 to finally realize a dream of making a home for their children with disabilities.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to Governor DeWine, Director Davis, the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, and the Ohio House of Representatives who, separately and collectively, have made an unprecedented investment in services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). I am appreciative of the administration and the Ohio House's proposal to invest in the homemaker/personal care service to help increase the average wage of DSPs providing that service. We are an agency that takes pride in the services we provide and the persons we hire to support individuals with IDD. Each week we provide over 12,500 hours a of homemaker personal care services. For the past 12 months the amount of open hours in our weekly schedule has been as high as 3600 hours per week over to put it another way; one third of the hours we are contracted to provide are not filled with suitable staff. We cover those hours with overtime of existing staff and supervisory personnel but this number of weekly open hours cannot be sustained. We are also on pace this year to expend over \$300,000 in overtime to cover open hours. The weekly open hours and the amount of overtime expended are all record setting

amounts due to the worst staffing crisis we have seen since we started our first home in 1981. . I can tell you how this impacts our existing clients with limiting access to community outings or no staff to do an extras that our clients really enjoy. Ms. Nachtwey will now tell you how this will impact new clients being referred. We are working with our local county board of DD to open a new home for 4 young men with autism and high behavioral needs. Three young men are in respite services in our County and cannot return home. Another young man is in a state institution here locally and is waiting on this home to open. We are very concerned about the agency's ability to find staff in this severe staffing crisis. We believe that an increase in staff starting salary to \$13.00 per hour will add significant impact in our ability to attract staff for this new project and reduce overtimes and open weekly hours for our existing clients. [As an agency committed to providing services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, the investment helps ensure my agency can continue to provide our array of services.

The developmental disabilities services field is in agreement on the direction and actions to be taken to increase our support and positive outcomes for individuals with disabilities and their valued DSPs. On behalf of my agency, my staff, and the individuals we support, I encourage you, Senator Dolan and Members of this Committee, to support the proposed budget provisions relevant to the Department of Developmental Disabilities. Together we can be successful in helping those we support now and those persons with IDD we need to support in the future.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tony Thomas, Executive Director, Welcome House

Megan Nachtwey, Associate Executive Director, Welcome House.