



Testimony on HB 110
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Chair Roemer, Ranking Member West, and members of the Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services;

On behalf of the Ohio Association of County Boards of Developmental Disabilities, I thank you for the opportunity to present testimony supporting House Bill 110, the state's biennial budget. HB 110 builds on many of the successes achieved two years ago in HB 166, and we are grateful to the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities and the Ohio Department of Medicaid for their transparency and willingness to collaborate during the past year and during the development of this proposed budget.

In the last budget, the 133rd General Assembly made historic investments in the DD system. Reimbursement rates for certain home- and community-based services (HCBS) had been stagnant for many years, causing direct support professional (DSP) wages to become uncompetitive. Facing a critical workforce shortage, this chamber rose to the occasion by increasing an initially modest rate proposal to elevate the statewide average DSP wage to roughly \$13 per hour. County boards partnered with the state to help finance the new rate. A new provider wage verification tool launched at the beginning of this year will help provide important accountability for the use of those funds.

The ongoing pandemic has strained the DD system in ways we could not have anticipated. As employees have become ill or forced to quarantine, providers and county boards alike have struggled with staffing challenges that compound the system's already strained workforce. New and innovative collaborations developed between county boards and their provider partners to ensure uninterrupted delivery of vital services and the provision of appropriate personal protective equipment for provider staff. Pandemic-related funding cuts to the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) resulted in the state not being able to fulfill its obligation with regard to the HB 166 DSP wage increase, but county boards were able to step up and fill the funding gap using money set aside for this purpose.

It is with that context in mind that we share our support for Governor DeWine's priorities in HB 110. The DODD proposal continues the DSP rate established in the last budget. Coupled with additional existing supports for DSP training, retention, and recruitment, these policies have helped to mitigate the system's workforce crisis.

Funding Assistive Technology and Remote Supports

New one-time funding in this proposed budget will support an innovative technology grant program. Technology can be a powerful tool for fostering independence and ensuring safety, and many solutions are available today as low-cost consumer goods. Over the last year, we have seen more than ever before the

troubling impact social isolation can have on people's lives, and it is OACB's hope that investments like these grants can help promote community integration and inclusion for people with developmental disabilities.

Maintaining State Support for Early Intervention Services

This budget also continues critically important funding for the state's Early Intervention programs. Early Intervention (EI) allows specialists from a county board of DD or other provider to work directly with young children with developmental disabilities or delays and their families to help them build skills that enhance development. In many cases, EI services can help reduce or even eliminate the need for more intensive and expensive services later in a child's life, thereby improving outcomes for the child, their family, and the community. This program was expanded to include children impacted by lead exposure or neonatal abstinence syndrome in FY 20-21, significantly increasing statewide program enrollment. This continued funding represents a key support for families of young children with developmental delays.

Supporting Multi-System Youth and Families

OACB is particularly encouraged by the Governor's continued commitment to supporting multi-system youth and their families. Again building on momentum created in HB 166, this budget contains new funding aimed at providing innovative new tools to address this population's complex needs. One such project will create multi-disciplinary response teams to provide trauma-informed care, education, and support for families in the home setting. Another initiative complementing OhioRISE will provide children with complex needs and their families with creative, flexible supports in their communities. Serving these children and their families is a top priority for our field, and county boards of DD remain eager and willing partners to the Ohio Department of Medicaid on these initiatives.

Cutting Administrative Red Tape

HB 110 also contains administrative clean-up items important to county boards. First, a requirement that every county board employ a business manager and a Medicaid services manager will be reinstated into the revised code. This language was inadvertently deleted through the last budget process. The requirement is currently followed by every county board and is intended to ensure sound fiscal operation and regulatory compliance. Second, this budget includes a provision making certain departmental audits discretionary, reducing administrative burden on the state and counties. This common-sense change preserves necessary departmental oversight but ensures that DODD and county board staff can focus their time and resources on helping people with developmental disabilities.

Furthering Ohio's Investments in DSPs

As you begin to consider ways to improve on the Governor's proposal, we urge you to build on the progress made over the last two years despite the significant setbacks imposed by the pandemic. As legislative leaders from both parties noted two years ago, allowing direct support wages to stagnate again will only exacerbate the DSP workforce shortage. Additional state investment in DSP wages would help support Ohio's caregivers at this critical time. County boards support our provider partner associations that are requesting additional state funds to support a rate increase. As you have heard from them, the need is substantial. We believe an increase is warranted, and we look forward to working with you throughout the budget process to address this and other challenges facing people with developmental disabilities. I thank you for your time and attention, and will be happy to answer any questions.