



**Testimony on HB 110
House Finance Health and Human Services Sub-Committee**

Chairman Roemer, Ranking Member West, and esteemed committee members,

Ohio APSE wants to thank you for giving us the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Jan Dougherty and I am Co-President of Ohio APSE (Advancing People Supporting Employment First). Ohio APSE was established in 1993. APSE is the only national organization devoted to Employment First. Employment First is a movement to deliver meaningful employment, fair wages, and career advancement for people with disabilities. We've advocated for decades on policy, advocacy, and sharing the best practices, tools, and connections to move the needle forward toward inclusive, fair employment for all.

Of utmost concern has been maintaining continuity of critical supports to employees with disabilities who have remained on the job as “essential workers” throughout the healthcare crisis. Indeed, many people with disabilities work in the types of businesses identified as essential during the pandemic, such as grocery stores, retail distribution centers and medical/healthcare facilities. Many of these essential workers regularly rely on supports from job coaches and employment specialists (DSPs) to navigate changes in business practices and job responsibilities. These direct support professionals are crucial in ensuring the safety and health of people with disabilities. Supported workers need assistance to understand universal precautions fully, to adjust to work responsibilities that are changing in real-time, and to ensure communications are understood. Additionally, there is often a need to assist in mitigating anxiety and other emotional responses as best as possible.

Vocational rehabilitation (VR) or Medicaid typically fund employment services via payments to community-based service providers. However, when the economy quickly shut down, the regular flow of VR and Medicaid dollars at the local level was hampered by complicated state and federal regulations that define how services are delivered. In the early weeks of the crisis, community-based service providers needed to quickly pivot to provide supports remotely, utilizing various forms of readily available technology, often without complete assurance that remote service delivery would be reimbursed. Despite a relatively quick response from state and Federal VR and Medicaid authorities to enhance flexibility and adjust funding requirements, these efforts were not fast enough to avoid the fact that many community-based services providers had to shut down programs and furlough staff.

Since the start of the pandemic, APSE has collaborated with the broader disability advocacy community to ensure that emergency response efforts to COVID-19 included an intentional focus on addressing the

needs of people with disabilities. Of vital concern has been maintaining supported employment and other employment services in our local communities so that people with disabilities who can work have the supports they need to remain successful and safe on their jobs.

- Recent data gathered by the Ohio Provider Association (OPRA), showed that 69% of agency providers would be able to serve more people and/or expand service delivery in **Individualized Employment Supports (IES)** if the rate matched the OOD rate.
- Additional data collected through Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD), showed that OOD referrals to community-based service providers compared to previous years was slightly to significantly down by 61%.

Ohio APSE is very supportive of the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine, Director Davis for the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD), and Director Miller for Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD). With these budget initiatives and the leadership of Director Davis and Director Miller, Ohioans with developmental and intellectual disabilities will continue to receive **most** of the vital services people with disabilities rely on. Unfortunately, the system's Home and Community-Based waiver **Employment Services** were not included in this budget initiative, nor in the previous biennium.

Just as the importance of Homemaker Personal Care, Day and Vocational Services and Nonmedical Transportation, a healthy and robust workforce is critical to the recovery of our economy for people with disabilities to continue to participate in and contribute to the labor market. We must ensure the sustainability of the disability employment services sector.

To best support these services and the Ohioans who receive and provide them, the follow additional initiatives must be included in DODD's budget:

1. Add **Employment Services** to DODD's budget to make it possible to ensure that people with disabilities who can work are able to enter or return to the workforce quickly as part of Ohio's recovery plan.
 - A. HCBS funding makes it possible for direct support staff, including job coaches and job developers, to provide supports so that individuals with disabilities who are working at this time can do so safely and effectively.
 - B. Funding for HCBS will ensure that people with disabilities who can work are able to enter or return to the workforce quickly as part of our country's overall recovery efforts. HCBS funding can also be used for assistive technology to facilitate virtual work as needed.

Thank you very much for your leadership and you and your staff's time and effort to advancing services to Ohioans that so greatly need them. Please let me know if I can be of any help in this process.



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