

# Empowering People Inc.

House Committee on Finance and Appropriations

Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services

Testimony of Kurt A. Miller

President/CEO – Empowering People Inc.

March 2, 2021

Chairperson Roemer and esteemed members of the Finance Subcommittee my name is Kurt Miller and I am the President/CEO of Empowering People Inc. I would like to thank you all for your willingness to consider my written testimony. Empowering People is a healthcare management company that provides services to over 700 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities in licensed ICF homes, I/O waiver homes and in day programs and in community employment placements. We currently have over 1200 wonderful employees in our organization.

I would like to start by offering my support of Director Davis' DODD budget proposal. I am very appreciative of his and the department's commitment to increased funding in the areas of direct support professionals, day services, and his commitment to creativity in serving youth with behavioral needs. These are all services that were a focus of the last budget and I am pleased to see that these areas continue to be a focus of the department. The workforce emergency the II/DD field is facing is the single greatest threat to our system.

The life line of serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities is the direct support professional (DSP). The responsibility that DSPs shoulder each day is boundless. They not only provide direct support, but emotional support that is integral to the well-being of

Ohioans with disabilities. While the responsibility of DSPs has increased through the years, wages unfortunately have remained relatively stagnant. When you include the added pressure of COVID-19 the workforce emergency has now reached levels that exceed our worst fears. Recruitment and retention is more challenging than ever and the wages offered no longer exceed those of other entry level positions. When you combine these factors with the vision to serve more people in smaller community settings the workforce emergency will continue to worsen unless we begin to focus our efforts to address this issue. The workforce task force being suggested would be an essential first step to addressing what could be a catastrophic problem if left unaddressed.

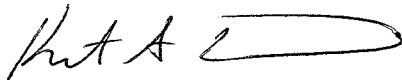
A substantial commitment is required to ensure that Ohioans with I/DD have the appropriate support available to experience life to the fullest. DSPs routinely sacrifice so much to care for the people we serve. When COVID-19 arrived, they were asked to sacrifice their own safety and the safety of their families to provide care and support to Ohioans with I/DD. While DSPs have persevered, they are growing weary, and understandably so. It is for these reasons that I fully support the following priorities for your consideration:

- A 5% increase in the first year and a 3.5% increase the second year for the ICF reimbursement methodology to be implemented as written. This will allow the formula to continue in statute and grant providers the ability to increase wages and ensure adequate support for the people we serve.
- A budget amendment that will allow ICF providers an opportunity to choose which method of reimbursement is used for their agency to minimize the negative impact that COVID-19 will have on future services and rates.

- A 5% rate increase on January 1, 2022, and January 1, 2023 for Homemaker/Personal Care services, Day and Vocational services, and non-medical transportation services. These rate increases will ensure wages continue to improve for the direct support professionals and build upon the foundation that was laid during the previous budget.
- Support for the Governor's budget focused on serving multi-system youth. These young people are currently being under-served and this investment will allow providers to better meet their needs, as they are truly unique

For many years providers have been warning of the growing workforce crisis in the field of IIDDD. The previous budget laid a path to begin to correct past issues and this budget has the opportunity to improve upon that foundation. Thank you all for your consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kurt A. Miller", followed by a large, stylized flourish or underline.

Kurt A. Miller, President/CEO  
Empowering People Inc.