



March 4, 2021

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

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

I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Paul J. Soprano, and I am the Director of OakLeaf Services at United Cerebral Palsy Association (UCP) of Greater Cleveland. We are headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio, and serve individuals with disabilities in Cuyahoga, Lorain, and Medina Counties. We are a not-for-profit business that provides supports for about 400 adult and 760 children with intellectual, developmental, and other types of disabilities and we employ approximately 155 persons.

I am 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 the vital services that organizations like mine provide.

I lead the largest division of UCP of Greater Cleveland, OakLeaf Services, a center of excellence for adults. We serve people in two 8-bed ICF's, Adult Day and Senior Adult Day Support, Vocational Habilitation, Career Planning, Group Employment, Individual Employment, and Non-Medical Transportation. We are also a Community Rehabilitation Partner (CRP) of OOD. All our services have two overarching outcomes of Community Integration and/or Community Employment.

Despite the great challenges the COVID-19 pandemic presented to our agency and those we support, we placed 91 individuals, many of whom had the most significant level of disabilities, into integrated community employment, working on average 24 hours per week and earning \$10.75 per hour. Their combined wages contributed about \$1.15 million to the Northeast Ohio economy in 2020. We also have increasingly focused our efforts at working with transition-age youth, through five Project SEARCH job readiness training sites in northeast Ohio, extensive summer youth employment programming, and pre-employment transition services for younger high schoolers with disabilities.

Additional resources and investment from the State of Ohio, particularly for increased wages for Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), are critical if we are to be able to attract and retain highly skilled front-line staff and remain a viable and competitive employer of entry level and paraprofessional staff.

LeafBridge: A Center of Excellence for Children

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To best support these services and the Ohioans who receive and provide them, I encourage you to add the following initiatives into Ohio's biennium budget:

- Increase general revenue fund appropriations in DODD's budget to fund much needed Homemaker and Personal Care, Day and Vocational Services and Nonmedical Transportation Medicaid home and community-based waiver services rate increase. *These increases will provide much needed funds for Direct Support Professional (DSP) wages, support for other front-line professionals and sustain the infrastructure necessary to provide our services.*
- Increase general revenue fund appropriations in DODD's budget to support the reimbursement formula for intermediate care facilities (ICF).
- Support a budget amendment that would allow ICFs to choose between a reimbursement rate freeze or a continuation of the formula for the first year of the biennium.
- Support the creation of a Task Force to address our system's workforce challenges. *This Task Force will identify several initiatives and projects designed to help providers recruit and retain a qualified workforce.*
- Support the as introduced budget for Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities

With your leadership, together we can ensure these services are available to the Ohioans that so greatly need them! Thank you again, for the opportunity and privilege to bring my concerns before you, and if I can ever be of any help in this process, please let me know.

Sincerely,

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