



ECHOING HILLS

**Testimony on HB 110
Senate Finance Committee
May 13, 2021**

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Minority Member Sykes and esteemed Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to submit written testimony to the Committee today on HB 110.

My name is Tim Neville. I am the President / CEO of Echoing Hills Village, Inc. Echoing Hills corporate office is located in Warsaw, Ohio (Coshocton County), with four regional offices throughout Ohio located in Athens, Lorain, Montgomery, and Stark/Summit Counties. We are a not-for-profit Christian ministry that provides supports for nearly 550 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We employ over 500 employees.

Echoing Hills' mission is to "Revolutionize Lives where people live, learn, connect, play and worship." Our journey started with Rev. D. Cordell Brown, a man born with cerebral palsy, and his dream of serving people like himself. We humbly began nearly 55 years ago as Camp Echoing Hills – two rustic cabins set in rural Ohio. Today we serve individuals with disabilities throughout Ohio providing an array of services from Home and Community Based Services (respite, recreation, residential, adult day services, and education) to services provided in Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities—more commonly referred to as ICFs. All services support our belief that all individuals can live purposeful lives with dignity and respect.

I write today to encourage the Committee to increase funding for services administered by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities. I would like to tell you two stories of how the workforce emergency affects individuals served by Echoing Hills.

Over the years, Camp Echoing Hills has provided a respite for families providing care for their child or loved one. Sometimes, it is the only week in a year where they can have a break from being a caregiver. Last summer, due to the pandemic, Camp Echoing Hills was closed. This year our Camp has reopened; however, the workforce crisis impacts our ability to recruit summer camp counselors. We are strategically limiting the number of campers so that we can safely provide the best camping experience for all. Recently, our Camp Administrator had a conversation with the mom of one of our campers. Her daughter has significant medical issues that we typically can accommodate, providing a week of respite at Camp. This year, we are not able to do so due to the lack of workers. This mother is devastated, and it broke our hearts to tell her that we couldn't accommodate. She needs the respite desperately after missing Camp for two seasons, and Camp is her daughter's highlight of the year.

My second story is about a young man in Stark County. He would like to move out of his current living situation with three other housemates. His dream is to move out on his own, with Echoing Hills becoming his service provider. Due to the labor shortage, we are unable to provide him these specific services as we are already struggling to fulfill our current commitment of staffing our current supports and services. We are unable to fulfill his dream.

Echoing Hills budgets for 570 employees representing over 460 full-time equivalent employees. Currently, we have over 90 positions open, representing 58 full-time equivalent employees throughout our five regions in the State of Ohio. We are currently operating with a weekly deficit of 2,320 hours or 120,640 hours in a year. This increases our overtime rate and burnout of our workforce. With this workforce emergency, we no longer consider referrals for service unless they can be provided in one of our current service delivery locations and without additional staffing resources.

There are many facets to this staffing crisis. I would like to discuss one of these facets, the pandemic. Federal and state incentives, such as extended and enhanced unemployment benefits, as well as stimulus checks in the thousands of dollars, have provided individuals many reasons to not engage in the service delivery workforce. While the Ohio Legislature may not have the authority to influence policy change in the federal arena, you do have the authority to enhance the funding for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities throughout Ohio.

Last fall, Echoing Hills utilized 1.6 million dollars to directly impact frontline workers—Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), nurses, and supervisors. Our current average DSP rate is \$14.06 per hour, and we cannot compete with other businesses that can raise the cost of a unit of service and pay \$15 to \$18 per hour. We are dependent on the State of Ohio House and Senate to consider increasing rates for service providers.

The House's version of HB 110 makes a small investment in day services for Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities. While any investment in these services is welcomed, I believe there is still more the General Assembly can do to ensure the sustainability and accessibility of services for Ohioans with disabilities. As a provider of an array of services, I am asking for your consideration as put forward by the Ohio Provider Resource Association and Ohio Health Care Association. Echoing Hills is a member of both organizations.

The staff at Echoing Hills has tirelessly served individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities for years. The past 14 months of this pandemic have added additional work and stress. They are physically worn out, emotionally exhausted, and they desperately need more help.

I encourage you to add the following initiatives into Ohio's biennium budget to best support my staff, my services, and the Ohioans we support:

1. Increase the Department of Developmental Disabilities appropriates to support waiver reimbursement for homemaker personal care (including on-site, on-call), adult day services, non-medical transportation, respite services, and shared living.
 - A 5% increase for each service initiated on 1/1/2022
 - A 5% increase for each service initiated on 1/1/2023

2. Increase the Department of Developmental Disabilities appropriation to fund the intermediate care facility for individuals with intellectual disabilities (ICF-IID) program.
 - Increase funds by 1.75% for FY 22
 - Increase funds by 3.5% for FY 23
3. Establish temporary statute that would calculate that, for FY 22, an ICF-IID would receive the greater of their projected July 1, 2021 per-diem formula rate or their June 30, 2021 rate. The formula would run normally in FY 2023.
4. Support the creation of a task force to address our system's workforce challenges.

The total request of these four initiatives is an additional 120 million dollars in Ohio's biennium budget. The additional funds will create opportunities for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to realize their dreams. I would like to leave you with one last story of the great work that the staff at Echoing Hills do every day.

My sister Sherry came to live with you when I went off to my first year of teaching in Cleveland Hts. 48 years later, and she is still with you. It has been the best thing that ever happened to her. She has her own room! She goes to work. She buys clothes. The aides style her hair and put on makeup. She reads books. She initiates conversations!! She has never done that before. She only answered questions. I have seen her grown more in the last five years since moving into Rayl than in the last 40 years. We'd like to thank everyone at Echoing Hills and the Rayl home for letting us see another side of our sister that we have never seen. I don't know if you realize how huge that is? I am only sorry that my parents did not get to see her transformation into an individual with opinions and feelings and meaningful conversations. We see the way Sharon is treated, the respect shown to her as an individual, the caring for her well-being, the laughter that is shared with her, the caring faces as they tell us something that she has said or done.

- Sherry's sister Betsy

Together, with your leadership, 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. If I can be of any help in this process, please let me know.

Sincerely,



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