

Caroline Lahrmann Testimony to Ohio Senate Finance Committee  
Tuesday May 18th

Chairman Dolan and Ranking Member Sykes,

My name is Caroline Lahrmann. I am a mother of twins with intellectual and developmental disabilities and I am testifying in support of the Protection and Advocacy Transparency Amendment. Ohio's protection and advocacy system, Disability Rights Ohio, DRO, undermines the rights of individuals with disabilities who require intensive supports in intermediate care facilities which provide health care and residential services to people who have intellectual disability (i.e. mental retardation). Our family and hundreds of other Ohio families have had to fight DRO's policies to preserve our disabled children's access to this vital program.

DRO's policies to reduce ICFs have caused large upward swings in the state budget. Over the last biennium about \$100,000,000 was allocated to fund DRO's ICF closure policies, including 700 exit waivers which exit or push people out of ICFs. Director Davis testified that there is funding for another 700 exit waivers (about \$70 million) in the proposed budget bill.

This exit waiver funding is being misused by DRO. DRO is meeting with ICF residents without the permission of their parents and guardians to encourage them to leave ICFs. These residents function as adults at the level of a small child and as such are highly prone to manipulation. A probate court has deemed them incompetent and appointed a guardian to protect them. DRO's efforts undermine the parent/ child and guardian/ ward relationships.

Because of DRO's policies, Ohio has gone from 6,000 ICF beds in 2014 to 4,400 today. This 1,600 bed reduction in congregate care is a primary cause of the workforce crisis. Ohio has decreased its capacity to serve people in highly efficient congregate settings where resources like staffing are shared. At a large ICF, one nurse can serve 20 patients on a shift. If you move those 20 patients into a one on one care setting, as DRO advocates, instead of just one nurse, you now need 20 nurses. So, as Ohio carries out DRO's policies to close ICFs, Ohio is destroying its capacity to safely and cost effectively maximize the number of vulnerable people it can serve in both ICFs and on the waiver. This is not just theoretical. This committee has heard testimony from providers who cannot find the staff to serve all their clients. Without sufficient staff, providers cannot take on new clients, and they may even have to resign as the provider for some clients. COVID is only partly to blame because providers have been raising the issue of the workforce crisis since 2015 when ICF closures were well underway.

Funding the 700 exit waivers in the proposed budget bill will exacerbate the workforce crisis and attack the health supports of the most vulnerable Ohioans. This money should be reallocated across the system to solve the workforce crisis, not increase it.

I urge you to approve the Protection and Advocacy Transparency Amendment to provide accountability to an agency that has caused significant disruption in services to people with disabilities throughout the DD system with its ICF closure policies.

Thank you for your consideration,

Caroline Lahrman  
Mother and Co-guardian for Henry and Elizabeth Lahrman

