



4/29/2021
Ohio Senate
Health Committee, Chairperson Huffman

Chairperson Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and Esteemed Members of the Senate Health Committee,

My name is Peter Moore and I would like to thank you for this opportunity to present this testimony, it is a true honor to be here today. I am here to provide testimony on behalf of the Ohio Provider Resource Association (OPRA), a statewide association that represents 180 private provider organizations serving over 32,000 people with developmental disabilities with a DSP workforce of over 24,000 strong.

I would like to start by expressing our deepest gratitude to you, Ohio's Lawmakers, for your support of the developmental disability field over the past several years and for allowing us the opportunity to testify again in front of this Committee. Two years ago Ohio's state operating budget set the foundation for us to begin to seriously take on the workforce issue by increasing Homemaker Personal Care (rates) so we could raise the average wage for Direct Support Professionals. It also allowed us to continue to support the specialized services our Intermediate Care Facilities (ICF) provide by continuing a rate formula that allows for growth. This was the first serious attempt to address the workforce issue in nearly two decades.

We are appreciative of all the difficult work the House put into House Bill 110 and all the difficult decisions this committee will have to make as HB 110 makes its way through the Senate. We are here to support you through this process.

The theme for my testimony today remains consistent with my previous three testimonies given in the House; Workforce, Workforce, Workforce. Prior to the pandemic our Members were in a workforce crisis, but for many providers the crisis has turned to a workforce emergency. There is no time to loss in being intentional and strategic in addressing their workforce issues. At OPRA we have 4 Guiding Principles that act as our compass for times like these. The first principle talks about the importance of the relationship between front-line professionals and the people we support. We are looking for great people, a workforce that values these relationships and a system that rewards a professionals for their efforts. With your partnership we believe we can build amazing and fulfilling relationships and help the people we support live full and productive lives.

We are proud of the community that supports Ohioans with developmental disabilities. The COVID-19-related health risks for some Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities are significantly higher than the rest of the population. Yet, with unwavering grit and determination and with the support of local and state-level partners, providers have been able to step up in unbelievable ways to keep the people they serve and employ healthy and safe. But make no mistake, the virus further highlighted the fact that at the end of the day, Ohioans with developmental disabilities need qualified and well-compensated staff.

We already see the fallout from some of the ways COVID-19 has likely permanently altered the system's ability to maintain their workforces. Looking toward the future, there is no doubt our biggest priority is how to build and maintain a quality workforce and improve our ability to compete with the other entities who are also facing their own workforce challenges.

Ohio's providers have been very open and honest about the challenges they are facing. We recently polled our Members to get a sense of the reality of what they are facing when it comes to the workforce challenges. The following is a small sample of the responses we received:

"Highest turnover and vacancy rates in organization history. Staff are personally in stress due to COVID and this job is high stress, high demand"

"Other industries have increased wages to improve recruiting effort. We cannot compete."

"Open positions have increased to 90 open DSP positions. We are seeing a decreased amount of DSP recruitment even with sign on bonus and recruitment bonus."

"Both DSP and nurse openings are open longer than expected and turnover has increased. We are being passed in wages by many other professions."

"Many people come to apply and report they can make more from unemployment than through this job."

"We're losing staff at a greater rate than we can hire. In the "new normal" we're looking at having to have even more DSP's. How do we cope with this?"

"We hit a surge late April-May and are now with a higher percentage of overtime and vacancies since that time period. The short-term windfall of staff have now returned to their jobs and our long-term staff are tired and leaving the workforce. Wages from competitors has passed ours once again."

"We have open positions in every department and quarantine is not helping"

"I feel like we are hanging on by a thread"

"I'm a positive person. I always look for the 'good stuff' in life. I do not see a light. I do not see a future that gets better. I've considered leaving the industry vs being entrenched in it and watching it fall apart."

If any of you are interested in getting first-hand sense of the situation providers are in right, I am extending an invitation to each of you to sit in one of our committees to hear directly from our Members.

The needs of the people we support and the demands of our system are evolving and Ohio's providers need your support to meet those needs and demands. It is clear that an investment from this chamber is a key component to helping us address the workforce emergency. We are focused the survival of a service delivery system that has taken 50 years to develop and evolve to where it is today.

We are appreciative of the federal assistance we have received through one-time payments, but we need to continue to work on a long-term strategy. House Bill 110's sub-bill makes a small investment in day services for Ohioans with developmental disabilities, an investment for which we are grateful for.

We believe the initiatives we developed at the beginning of this budget process remain necessary to ensure quality services are provided to Ohioans with developmental disabilities. We encourage the committee to include the below initiatives in their next iteration of HB 110:

- **Homemaker and Personal Care (including on-site/on-call and transportation), Day and Vocational Services, Nonmedical Transportation Waiver Services, shared living, and respite services** We are requesting two 5% increases to the rates in these three service areas over the next Biennium. These increases will provide the funds needed for DSP wages, support other front-line professionals and sustain the infrastructure needed to support the front-line workforce. One increase on 1/1/22 and the second increase on 1/1/23.
- **Intermediate Care Facilities** After years of work, we were able to establish an ICF formula that has worked for providers. We would like to continue to implement that formula. We are asking for a 1.5% increase in the first year of the biennium and 3.5% increase in the second year. Given the challenges that the global pandemic presented when it came to budgeting in 2020, we are recommending a budget amendment that would allow us to establish two reimbursement paths that would minimize the negative impact of the virus on ICF rates.
- **Multi-System Youth** We are supportive of the investment proposed in the Governor's budget focused on serving young people who are faced with many unique challenges.
- **Workforce Challenges** We would like create a Task Force to address our system's workforce challenges. This Task Force will identify several initiatives and projects that are designed to help providers recruit and retain a qualified workforce.

Thank you for your time and attention today. We are looking forward to working with you on the budget and we want to be a resource for you as you navigate the needs of our system.

Respectfully Submitted,



Peter J. Moore
President and CEO
Ohio Provider Resource Association