

## **Interested Party Testimony for House Bill 110 (Oelslager)**

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*Med1Care*

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Chairman Huffman, Vice Chairman Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on HB110—the state operating budget. My name is Kati Christner and I am the Director of Nursing and Operations for Med1Care.

Med1Care is a home health and medical staffing agency. We serve over 700 patients a day in over 26 counties in northwest Ohio. We operate out of two offices, one in Findlay and one in Holland, Ohio. We are proud to employ approximately 400 employees and staff over 10,000 hours per week to your constituents who choose to receive care in their homes.

I am here today to testify in support of an amendment that would increase Medicaid rates for home and community-based providers by 5% in FY22 and 5% in FY23 (a 10% increase total). While we appreciate the inclusion of the 4% increase in the Governor's as introduced version of the budget, the 4% increase is simply not enough for providers to continue to support the vulnerable patient population where it matters most, at home.

Home health services play a vital role in keeping older Ohioans safe at home and living independently. Our services also keep family units together and in their homes under a variety of circumstances such as: when caring for children with disabilities, assisting individuals that are medically dependent on equipment or IV therapies, supporting those recovering from surgery or requiring wound care.

The presence of caregivers in the home plays an important role in reducing hospitalizations, emergency room visits, and nursing home stays which are all much more costly to the state. While it is hard to quantify, we know from regular interaction with our patients that if we were not in the home providing care, many individuals would delay or defer care and end up in a worsened condition requiring more intensive and costlier forms of care.

Medicaid reimbursement rates for skilled home health workers, like Registered Nurses (RN), Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN), and Aides are slightly less today than they were in 1998. The 4% increase in the as introduced version of the budget is a step in the right direction, but it still leaves RNs \$5.70 behind 1998 levels and LPNs \$12.72 behind 1998 levels.

The low Medicaid reimbursement rates have negatively affected our business, the workforce and ultimately our ability to meet the hours of care needed in the community. We are not able to recruit and retain workforce so we cannot adequately staff patients

because we do not have enough nurses or aides. This week is Ohio In-Demand Jobs Week and Registered Nurses top the list of Critical and In-Demand Jobs. I can tell you from my experience, they are going to continue to top that list because Ohio cannot entice nurses to work here because providers cannot pay competitive wages due to reimbursement rates that are stuck in the 90's.

Med1Care has worked to improvise over the years to identify ways to work around the low reimbursement rates so that we can still provide care in the community. We have networked with so many other agencies to team up to help patients, but we are all having the same struggle. Simply, the Medicaid reimbursement rates come nowhere close to covering the cost of doing business. As you saw in Joe Russell's testimony, providers like us lose significant money on every Medicaid visit and even with co-working with other providers, the current situation is untenable.

When we are unable to staff hours of care, the responsibility falls to the family of the patient. This burden has forced family members to call off work or make the tough decision to place their loved one in a nursing facility or quit their job so that they can stay home and provide care. A 10% increase in Medicaid reimbursement rates over the biennium will go directly to our employees' wages and benefits and will help us retain and recruit workforce.

Investing in home care offers a solution to the State of Ohio in helping to manage the cost of long-term services and supports. It is the more cost effective form of care and it is also where the majority of individuals want to receive their care. For most of us, home is our sanctuary. Imagine if you or your loved one had a life altering event that required skilled intermittent care. I know that I would want to receive care at home and stay connected in the daily lives of my family and my community. Unfortunately, home may not be an option for many Ohioans without change to Medicaid reimbursement rates.

How can we even begin to care for Ohioans if we cannot recruit a competitive workforce? Med1Care serves counties bordering Michigan and Indiana and we lose valuable Ohio workers regularly to those states due to their ability to make twice as much there and better provide for their families. Ohio must make proper investment in home and community based services so that we can pay competitive wages, recruit more workforce talent, and expand coverage to help more patients who choose to receive their care at home.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today. As a provider for constituents in some of your districts, I am asking you to support an amendment that would provide a 10% increase to home and community-based service rates over the biennium so that I can safely and effectively continue to provide services to the Medicaid population. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.