



*Celebrating 40 years*

# HORIZONS, INC.

Meeting the Needs of Individuals with  
Developmental Disabilities

*Donna E. Merrill*  
*Executive Director*

Testimony on HB 110  
Senate Health Committee  
May 4, 2021

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**Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio and esteemed Members of the Senate Health Committee,**

**I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to submit written testimony to the Committee today on HB110.**

My name is Donna Merrill, and I am the Executive Director of Horizons of Tuscarawas and Carroll Counties, Inc., located in Tuscarawas County. We serve individuals living in Wayne, Coshocton, Carroll, Harrison and Jefferson Counties. We are a nonprofit business that provides support for 67 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We have 178 employees, and our staff work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week – 365 days a year. We can never close. We need increases to pay staff for the services they render to this needed population. Horizons of Tuscarawas and Carroll Counties, Inc. has been in operation for nearly 45 years, as we opened our doors in May of 1976.

Our services are unique because we provide services in many rural counties. Our services are very important to the families and individuals that live in these rural counties and need care provided for their loved ones. I write to you today, to encourage the Committee to increase funding for services administered by Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities.

Our ability to hire an adequate work force has greatly changed since the start of the pandemic. Any positions that we have vacant, are staying open much longer. It is getting more and more difficult to find good employees. We serve in rural areas, which means that Walmart, McDonald's, Wendy's, and local factories that all offer much higher wages have become our main competitors.

Retention of our employees has also changed. Many of our staff will go to work at factories just to earn \$.25 to \$.50 an hour more. It is continuing to be difficult to retain employees. Everyone is looking for staff and it has become very competitive. It also does not help us that the people would rather remain on unemployment than seek these positions.

There has been a great shift in the types of people who are applying to our open positions. The staff are young and do not work long before they go off to another job. Our turnover is about 60 days, and then they move on. The employees applying do not seem to have the dedication. Jobs are plentiful right now, and they move on for \$.15 more.

Unfortunately, there are not enough people applying for jobs working in our field. We go weeks without getting any applications, and then when we do, we call, and then they are no longer interested once they find out our starting rates.

I do believe that better pay would help this crisis. Workforce changes have impacted our ability to deliver current and future services. As of right now, I have all of my administrative staff doing HPCP services, especially on the weekends. We have not been able in some areas to take on any new individuals because we do not have the staff.

Horizons of Tuscarawas and Carroll Counties, Inc.

Horizons does not discriminate in provision of services or employment because of handicap, race, color, creed, national origin, sex, or age and genetics.

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Overtime has been outrageous. We are paying around \$25-\$26 thousand dollars each pay period for overtime because we do not have enough staff. This is about \$52,000 a month in overtime. We greatly need an increase to encourage people to work in this field.

We have had to terminate our Day Program because we could not get enough staff. This was a Monday thru Friday 8:30am-4:30 position.

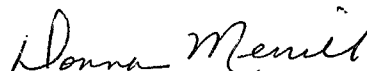
We must pay these employees a better wage so they will desire to work in this field. We have scaled down services in counties we no longer provide services, such as Ashland and Knox Counties.

The House's version of HB110 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 intellectual and developmental disabilities. Additional investments would help our agency by being able to pay more for staff, and reduce the overtime. With additional funding, and more staff we could reach and service new individuals. Looking forward to having administrative staff back to doing their jobs. It would help us move forward and accomplish our goals.

My staff have done amazing and heroic things since the pandemic began, but they are tired, emotionally exhausted and need help. I encourage you to add to the following initiatives into Ohio's biennium budget to best support my staff, my services, and the Ohioans we support:

- Increase general revenue fund appropriations in the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities budget to fund much needed rate increases for homemaker and personal care, day, vocational and employment services, nonmedical transportation, respite services, and shared living under the three Home and Community Based Services waivers administered by DODD.
- Increase general revenue fund appropriations in DODD's budget to support the reimbursement formula for intermediate care facilities (ICF).
- Allow a temporary change in statute to alter the ICP reimbursement rate calculations for the first year of the biennium.
- Support the creation of a task force to address our system's workforce challenges.

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.



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