



May 3, 2021

**Testimony on HB 110
Senate Health Committee**

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 HB 110.

My name is Paul J. Soprano, and I am the Director of OakLeaf Services at United Cerebral Palsy Association (UCP) of Greater Cleveland. We are headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio, and serve individuals with disabilities, mainly in Cuyahoga, Lorain, and Medina Counties. We are a not-for-profit business that provides supports for over 450 adult and 760 children with intellectual, developmental, and other types of disabilities annually, and we employ approximately 160 persons.

With 30 years in this field, I lead the largest division of UCP of Greater Cleveland, OakLeaf Services, a center of excellence for adults. We serve people in two 8-bed ICF's, Adult Day and Senior Adult Day Support, Vocational Habilitation, Career Planning, Group Employment, Individual Employment, and Non-Medical Transportation. We are also a Community Rehabilitation Partner (CRP) of Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD). All our services have two overarching outcomes of Community Integration and/or Community Employment.

I write today to encourage the Committee to increase funding for services administered by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities. My agency is finding it increasingly difficult to hire and retain a quality direct support professional (DSP) workforce. Not only has recruitment become more challenging over the past year, but getting new staff to show up to work on day one or work beyond the first few days of orientation is an increasing problem. The work we ask them to do is very hard, physically, and emotionally, and often entails very complex tasks, including delegated nursing, caring for the most vulnerable in our society. The pay and hours are not so great, and many staff would rather work for more money and less responsibility at the local grocery store or warehouse than care for medically fragile or behaviorally challenging individuals with developmental disabilities.

Once COVID-related restrictions are lifted, we will unlikely be able to restore our adult day services to previous levels due to our inability to staff them properly and safely. Furthermore, we were forced to close two remote day service locations, one in Westlake, and another in Highland Hills, over the past year due to their lack of financial viability. This means that approximately 60 individuals we once served will have to find another day service provider that is able to

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accommodate them. There is certainly no guarantee that they will find a qualified agency like UCP to meet their complex medical support needs. Other agencies may have to end their day services business altogether, if additional investment by the State of Ohio is not made soon. This will leave a huge service gap in the lives of persons with developmental disabilities that will ripple out to their families and caregivers who will lose the valuable support that adult day services offer.

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 intellectual and developmental disabilities. This is even more critical as **there has been no rate increase for day services since 2007!** As you can well imagine, the cost of doing business, including personnel and related expenses, have increased tremendously in the past 15 years. We have tried to increase staff wages to attract and retain quality direct support professionals, but without further investment, these valuable day services will be unsustainable for my agency and most other providers in Ohio.

My staff have done amazing and heroic work since the pandemic began, but they are tired, emotionally exhausted, and need help. They need additional coworkers to lessen the great burden they have been carrying, higher wages to encourage them to even remain in the DD field, and recognition by society of their job as an actual, valued profession, I encourage you to add the following initiatives to Ohio's biennium budget to best support my staff, my agency, and the vulnerable 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 ICF reimbursement rate calculations for the first year of the biennium.
- Support the creation of a task force to address our system's workforce emergency.

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.

Sincerely,

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