**Testimony on S.B. 218 – Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee**

**by Rajai Saleh**

**Thursday, June 5th, 2018**

Chairman Burke, Vice-Chair Beagle, Ranking member Tavares and members of the Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to be speak today. My name is Rajai Saleh and I am here to express my concerns with S.B. 218 – regarding minimum training and surety bonds for Medicaid Providers. I am here to advocate for myself, other people with disabilities and those that serve individuals with disabilities. I work with advocacy organizations such as the Ohio Olmstead Task Force, which advocates for individuals with disabilities to be part of and remain in the community, and I am a recent member of Hand in Hand, which advocates for domestic workers.

I am a consumer enrolled in the Ohio Home Care Waiver through Medicaid and receive about 9 hours of personal care a day. Because of my complex needs and the need for flexibility to work and live a normal life, I chose to have a non-agency provider (Independent Provider or IP) who lives with me provide the care of all of my activities of daily living. Using an IP and not having to go through an agency improved my life dramatically. I do not have to go through extra steps to have my basic needs taken care of. Many individuals in my situation who require flexibility and want quality care appreciate having family or friends be our providers and help us full-time. For many IPs, this is their full-time job, but the care they provide goes beyond the “approved hours.”

Recently, however, it has become more difficult to retain quality care because of the added regulations that cause more stress and complications rather than improve care and prevent “fraud.” Earlier this year, Electronic Verification Visit (EVV) was implemented and has made it more challenging on not only the caregiver but also on the person receiving care. It invades our privacy, restricts our freedom by forcing us to follow a schedule, and puts extra stress on our providers who risk losing pay if it’s not done properly. Many IPs are finding it more difficult to keep up with all the new regulations without extra compensation or incentive and have decided to leave this line of work. This, in turn, has caused a shortage of quality caregivers. The requirement to purchase a surety bond will only increase the shortage. IPs are self-employed, and therefore must pay for all training and certification requirements on their own. They must also pay for their own healthcare. Requiring the purchase of a surety bond is costly and is unnecessary in this situation.

IPs are already regulated much more than an agency and are less likely to commit fraud. Non-agency providers get reviewed yearly and must show proof of 12 hours of continuing education units, first aid training, timesheets, case notes of meetings with case manager and other team members affecting the consumer, copies of all service plan, a tax affidavit that is signed by a notary public, information on the consumer’s physician and medications, and other pertinent information of the consumer. The independent provider also gets a notification from the state reminding them that they must get a background check completed before a certain amount of time; otherwise, they could lose their Medicaid Provider number. The fact that these providers take care of their own documentation, shows that they are responsible and not ones to rely on an agency to provide the documentation for them. Agencies, on the other hand, get reviewed every three years, and many mistakes can go unnoticed for that long. Agencies operate as a business and not as an entity that cares about people. Instead of adding barriers, the State of Ohio should help caregivers and those receiving care live better lives. Increasing pay, adding benefits and providing more support to providers would be ways to increase quality care.

A state that is leading the nation in transitioning individuals from institutions and into the community should not make it more difficult for us to remain in the community. If you vote for this legislation, make no mistake, you are voting for a diminished quality of life for people like me. You are voting to increase the risk individuals with disabilities like me to be institutionalized. And, you are voting to set us back tremendously.  Don't vote to harm your constituents. Vote against this harmful legislation. Thank you for listening and I welcome any questions.