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**Testimony on HB 110
Ohio Senate Finance Committee
May 13th, 2021**

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Minority Member Sykes and esteemed Members of the Senate Finance 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 Janelle Wehrman and I am the CEO of Mercer Residential Services, Inc., and we are located in Mercer, Auglaize and Van Wert County. We are a not for profit business that provides supports for 65 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities and we employ 60 people. We provide community based services in small group homes as well as a small ICF home. We also run two day programs. We focus on individuals who are dual diagnosed and have made great strides with individuals who face many medical and behavioral challenges. Without our agency these individuals could easily end up living in a nursing home verses living in the community and engaging in everyday activities. I write today to encourage the Committee to increasing funding for services administered by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities.

Our agency provides services in counties that are considered fully employed or nearly employed. Since the COVID pandemic hiring has only become more difficult. We have had numerous position come open since the start of the pandemic that have not been filled. This is not typical of our agency. Due to the COVID pandemic, we have lost some valuable employees due to the inability to hire staff. Current valuable employees become tired as they are working more many more hours than they were before the pandemic. As a result valuable employees have chosen to resign from our agency. In coming applicants do not have the same work ethic as pervious employees. In coming applicants make it clear they do not plan to make a career out of being a Direct Support Professional and only plan to stay employed with the agency for 6-12 months. We also have applicants who are not eligible to be hired based on background checks.

Due to the inability to hire our agency has found the need to discontinue services with several long term clients. We have not been able to accept new clients as a result. We have had to down size our day programs as a result of the inability to hire new employees. Due to the inability to hire employees, this has also affected our ability to take individuals out in the community as we did before the pandemic as more employees are needed for these activities.

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. By having additional investments, we will be able to hire more appropriate employees, our individuals will be able to receive higher quality care and the individuals will be able to experience more community activities while remaining in their current home settings which they chose.

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 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 ICF 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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