



Testimony on SFY 24/25 Operating Budget
House Finance Committee

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeny, and esteemed committee members,

I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Sara Eppard and I am the State Director of Dungarvin Ohio, and we are located in Columbus, serving individuals across 11 counties in the state. We are an organization that provides residential and day services through the home and community-based waiver program administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). Our team of 184 employees are proud to provide essential services to 156 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

I am very supportive of the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Hauck for DODD and the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Miller for Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD). The changing labor landscape and accompanying shortage of workers, including direct support professionals (DSP), threatens our ability to provide the critical supports on which our the people we serve and their families rely. The budget proposed in HB 33 is a good foundation to help our system combat these many changes.

It has become increasingly difficult to recruit and retain staff based on the low reimbursement rates we receive, as we are 100% reliant on Medicaid funding. In the past three years, our employee retention rate has decreased by 30%, and our annual turnover is around 75%. Our ability to effectively hire and retain our employee base is crucial to our operation. Each month, Dungarvin turns down about 100 new referrals. We have shut down services in two counties, serving 10 people over the past year. At current reimbursement rates, our ability to continue operating is in jeopardy.

The vulnerable population we serve relies on consistent, caring staff to provide the essential supportive services they need to survive. Our staff dress those who cannot do it themselves, feed those who have arms that will not work, transport those who use wheelchairs in specialized vehicles and help mentor those who have behavioral struggles. The families of those served count on us to be there, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year to care for their loved ones.

The Governor's proposed budget initiatives, guided by the leadership of Director Hauck and Miller, is a great foundation to reinforce and rebuild the services provided by your agency. With these budget initiatives, Ohioans with disabilities will continue to receive the vital employment services organizations like mine provide. We encourage this committee to approve the Governor's budget proposal for DODD and to invest additional dollars through budget amendment HC0656 into these vital services to raise direct support professional wages to at least an average of \$20.64.

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 today.



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