

# PARTNERS in Employment, Inc.

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## 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 Linsey Hollingshead and I am the Director of Operations of PARTNERS in Employment, Inc., and we are located in Defiance, Ohio, serving 8 surrounding counties. We are an organization that provides competitive, integrated employment services through the home and community-based waiver program administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) as well as employment and vocational training through Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. Our team of 30 employees are proud to provide essential services to over 200 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental illness, physical disabilities, etc.

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) and employment specialists, threatens our ability to provide the critical supports on which 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.

Our current staff absolutely love what they do and who they work for, but we continue to struggle to attract new, qualified talent because we cannot pay competitively in this world of higher wages and higher inflation. Rate increases immediately flow to employees as wage increases. The low reimbursement rates are extremely detrimental for finding the professional staff required for advocating for employment equality.

Why are employment services vital to Ohioans? These services impact an individual with disabilities' life, prepares our workforce of tomorrow for the work place, and meets the labor needs of Ohio businesses.

Back in 2004, we helped an individual obtain a job in a shipping department. This involved creating multiple assistive devices and a modification in his schedule. He worked 2 hours a day, 5 days a week, prepping boxes and inserts so that items could be packaged more quickly by the rest of the department. This man is still employed almost 19 years later, with one of the best attendance records of any employee they have. He talks of his job with pride and knows how his contribution makes a difference in the company.

In 2021, we helped an individual obtain a job right out of high school as a dishwasher at a bakery. While we were coaching her in learning her job tasks as a dishwasher, she expressed a desire to one day be a baker. We facilitated conversations with the owner, and she soon moved from dishwasher to assistant baker.

## **PARTNERS in Employment, Inc.**

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In Summer 2022, we met with a student, his parents, and an OOD counselor after the student had completed a summer work experience. The parents enthusiastically described how their high school student independently began setting their alarm, laying their clothes out the night before, and preparing for work each morning. They discussed how getting their child to school was a battle, but the excitement of going to work motivated the student to be more independent at home.

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 PARTNERS in Employment, Inc. 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 ODD 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 and the Ohio employers that so greatly need them! **Thank you again, for the opportunity and privilege to bring my concerns before you today.**



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