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March 27, 2023

Dear 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 Jason Harris and I am the Director of Strategic Operations at LADD, located in Hamilton County, Ohio. As an autistic man and someone who has been on the receiving end of services and working with other advocates and friends who receive services, I know how important the impact DSP's can have on your life. How meaningful the working relationship is for you. And how hard it can be when someone you are close to and you have built a rapport with, moves on.

Today, I am speaking on behalf of LADD and so many others with developmental disabilities who are seeking support to live and contribute meaningfully to our communities and economy. LADD is an organization that provides an entire spectrum of critical services for adults with disabilities, including housing, employment, day programs and nursing. Our team of 185 employees are proud to provide essential services to over 700 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

LADD supports the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Hauck for DODD and Director Miller for (OOD). The budget proposed in HB 33 is a good foundation to help the developmental disabilities services system. As many of you know, LADD has over the past four years partnered with the State of Ohio to create new, more efficient ways of delivering community-based services. The staffing efficiencies we have developed through our Smart Living system are dramatic and result in better outcomes for the people receiving services while utilizing ½ the staff a traditional model requires. It is a game changer.

Last month, LADD was one of 73 organizations from around the world – 8 from the United States-- honored at the United Nations in Vienna Austria for its innovation in technology, staffing and community living. I offer this because while we are aligned with the governor's proposal, you must ALSO know, LADD is innovating and striving to raise the bar on both our services and HOW we deliver those services. We know our system must adapt. We MUST innovate. We must figure out a better way. LADD is leading the way to bring solutions to the table, **but in full transparency, our ability to hire staff fast enough limits our growth.** While we pay one of the highest starting and average wages for DSPs in the State of Ohio, the waiting list for our services remains long, in some instances, years long. There are families and people in need who are waiting for an opportunity—any opportunity to live and work in the community.

LADD sees its relationship with Ohio as a partnership—one we are very grateful for. Because you have invested in us, LADD is stepping up and meeting this incredibly challenging moment—delivering services while working tirelessly to innovate with new technology and staffing models that allow us to do more with less. We know people are living longer, more people with developmental disabilities are being born and that there are less people to provide these critical services. With the Governor's budget, the State of Ohio can help us deliver part of the solution. Innovation means nothing without scale. By increasing DSP wages, we will be able to more effectively scale Smart Living and bring real fundamental solutions to our system.

In conclusion, thank you for your capital support that has allowed Smart Living to become a reality. Thank you for considering what will amount to a wage increase for our frontline workers and thank you for believing that together we can find real solutions to the challenges before us strengthen our communities in the process.

Sincerely,

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