

Jan Dougherty/Co-President
Ohio Association of People Supporting Employment (APSE)
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Chair, Edwards, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the Finance Committee, my name is Jan Dougherty. I am the Co-President of Ohio's Chapter of Association of People Supporting Employment. APSE is the only national, non-profit membership organization dedicated to Employment First – a vision that all people with disabilities have a right to competitive employment in an inclusive workforce. To that end, we work to ensure that employment in the general workforce is the first and preferred outcome in the provision of publicly funded services for all working age citizens with disabilities, regardless of the impact of that disability.

I began my career in the employment field over 15 years ago. As the director of employment services in a provider agency, I lead a team of job developers and job coaches with the goal of transitioning individuals from day programs to community integrated employment. Presently, I am employed by a county board of developmental disabilities where my primary focus is to lead a team in assisting businesses and companies in diversifying their workforce by recruiting and hiring individuals with disabilities and barriers to employment.

As co-president of Ohio APSE, my main duty is to lead the organization towards accomplishing its goals and objectives, with a particular emphasis on promoting the Employment First Initiative in Ohio. Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities prioritizes funding for employment services such as career planning and individual employment support services, as it is an employment first state.

It is true that direct support professionals (DSPs) often bear the brunt of low wages in this care industry. Though, I'd like to bring attention to another crucial service area provided by direct support professionals that is equally affected by low wages and has received little attention- employment specialists. Inadequate availability and loss of employment specialists in this field due to low wages and shortages has had a significant impact on three areas: the person, the business, and the economy.

Impact on the person

Losing employment specialists due to workforce shortages and wages has had a significant impact on individuals with disabilities seeking employment. Without experienced and well-trained employment specialists, individuals will struggle to navigate the job market and find suitable employment.

Employment specialists play a vital role in connecting individuals with disabilities with potential employers, providing them with guidance on resume writing, job searches, and interview preparation. Losing these experts can lead to a decline in job placement rates and lead to increased unemployment rates.

In many counties in Ohio, providers are struggling to find employment specialists. Managers are job developing and covering job coaching shifts. Families are struggling to find job coaches to provide long term support at the workplace, which in turn puts the individual at risk of losing their job.

It is critical to address the workforce shortage and wage inequity and ensure that there is an adequate supply of skilled employment specialist to meet the needs of job seekers and employees with disabilities in Ohio.

Impact on the business community

More than any time before, our business partners are experiencing a largely openminded and progressively inclusive business community. Businesses are desperate for workers and individuals with disabilities interested in joining the workforce present an opportunity for accessing talented applicants. Further, society's advancing focus on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion has created new types of opportunities for promoting the conversation about employment for individuals with disabilities. More than ever, businesses are relying on individuals with

disabilities to fill their job needs. However, without the assistance of employment specialist to assist individuals with disabilities to tap into these open positions, many opportunities will be lost not just to the individual but also a lost of talent and skills that are vital to a company's success and a diverse qualified candidate.

The National Trends in Disability Employment – February 2022 Monthly Update (nTIDE), issued by The Kessler Foundation and the University of New Hampshire's Institute on Disability, indicates that the last several months have observed the highest employment to population rates for individuals with disabilities since they began tracking disability data in the Current Population Survey (CPS) in 2008 (see Chart below).

It is without a doubt a moment in time in which individuals with disabilities that are seeking employment can find more opportunities than ever before; however, without adequate employment specialist to help guide them towards these opportunities and advocate for their unique needs in the workplace, these opportunities will be lost.

Impact on Ohio economy

The lack of increased wages for employment specialist and their inability to help people with disabilities find jobs will have a negative impact on the Ohio economy. This is because those with disabilities are unable to access the job market and the economic benefits it provides. This means fewer people can purchase goods and services, create new businesses and services, and contribute taxes to the state.

Furthermore, when people with disabilities are in the workforce, they often can earn more money, which would further benefit the Ohio economy. Without providing employment opportunities to people with disabilities, the Ohio economy is failing to tap into a diverse workforce that could contribute to its full potential. This not only hinders the economy's growth but also leads to fewer tax revenues and higher demand for government benefits.

In conclusion, it is imperative to recognize that low wages not only affect DSPs but also employment specialists in this care industry. Addressing low wages for all workers in the industry can help improve the overall day to day quality of care and employment services provided to people with disabilities in Ohio.

Employment -to- Population Ratio

