



# koinonia

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

My name is Heidi Spaeth, and I am one of the Residential Managers of Koinonia and we are located in Northeast Ohio in Cuyahoga County, serving 350 individuals in several surrounding counties. We are an organization that provides intermediate care facilities for individuals with intellectual disabilities, residential, day, and 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 approximately 450 employees are proud to provide essential services to 350 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.

I have been employed by Koinonia for the past 13 years. The labor shortage has affected us as it has throughout all of Ohio in every type of business. The difficult reality however, is that we have minimal staffing levels that HAVE to be met to provide health and safety to the adults whom we have the privilege to serve. We cannot reduce our staffing levels simply because we do not have anyone to come in to work. The individuals need care every day.. on Christmas when most staff want to be with their OWN families .. on a Saturday morning when many parents wish they could see their own children play sports.. at night when many staff wish they could spend it in their own bed.. we are working to care for the individuals. Since we do not have enough direct support professionals, supervisory and management staff have to fill in the gaps in the schedule and work direct care in addition to the important work that they must also complete to keep us within Medicaid and Department of Developmental Disability regulations. The reality is that we have a lot of very tired staff doing the best we can to keep our individuals safe. There is so much more that we could do, however, to enrich their lives but we simply do not have the manpower to do so.

Some providers, including Koinonia, had to resort to closing a group home due to not having enough staffing to support the needs of the people residing in the home. The process for this includes giving 30-day notice to the individual and their guardian as well as the local county board of developmental disabilities that the provider can no longer serve the person. The local county board then is tasked with finding an alternative, often much more expensive home environment for the person with developmental disabilities to live. The option is often placing them in a Nursing Home or temporarily in a respite situation. Both of these options are much more expensive to provide, not to mention the fact that changing living situations is an unnecessary trauma to these Ohioans. Raising the average wage of the DSPs to \$20 will increase the amount of DSP staff available throughout Ohio and will provide stabilization to the individual's home environments.

I've worked in the field of Developmental Disabilities for the past 29 years. I worked for Hattie Larlham in the beginning of my career, mostly at the main campus location (Hattie Larlham Center for Children with Disabilities) in Mantua, Ohio

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in Portage County. I saw first-hand the positive difference that service locations such as these provide to families who are unable to care for their medically fragile and developmentally disabled children by themselves. With a physician, nurse practitioner, nurses, respiratory therapist and direct support professionals on staff, these children had a home with all the medical care that they need so they were not shunted back and forth to hospitals to get the medical and specialized care they needed. They had a quality of life for however long or short their life was. I know I made a difference in the lives of many families and the children and adults in our care for the 15 years that I was employed there. I unfortunately was laid off however due to budget constraints. I am just one of many that were laid off through the years due to the difficult budget dilemmas that IDD providers face.

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 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 an hour.

With your leadership, together we can ensure these services are available to the Ohioans that so greatly need them! Thank you for the opportunity and privilege to bring my concerns before you today.

*Heidi Spaeth*

Heidi Spaeth

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