

Chairperson Edwards, Vice-Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee— good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB33.

Good morning! My name is Justin Martin. I've had cerebral palsy from birth: my muscles are too tight to dress myself, to walk, to get in and out of bed or take a shower on my own, to prepare meals, or to drive a car to and from my job as a high school English teacher. Nothing that I just mentioned to you is a tragedy, because for most of my twenty-six years. Each of those issues have been solvable—until the pandemic, this state has allowed me to pay independent care providers a competitive living wage to take care of those needs. I was able to live independently on-campus at Kenyon College for four years— I shared an apartment with six other friends who I chose to live with, and my provider, a text away, was on the top floor. I could get into and out of bed whenever I needed to, choose when to take a shower, make plans with a friend for coffee or a movie at the spur of the moment instead of three weeks in advance or never, and not have to worry about what to do if I suddenly needed to go to the bathroom. With my basic needs taken care of, I was able to graduate with honors, become a crisis counselor for students in distress, and finally feel like a person. My world, previously narrow and gray, widened and filled with color.

If you're currently able-bodied, a world like that, where you can choose where you live and choose who to live with, choose when to wake up, shower, and sleep, choose what to wear and eat and not worry about getting onto a toilet – that probably feels unremarkable. It's the world that you found yourselves in yesterday, and this morning, and the one that will (probably) be there tomorrow. I wish that it were unremarkable to me.

But it is remarkable to me – remarkable because it vanished. During the pandemic, as wages and benefits increased in the industries we all use every day, like food service and retail, the state of Ohio continued to offer the men and women who built my freedom \$13/hour. Of course most of them left – I would have too. Before the pandemic, my mom and I were able to find a team of six independent providers in a village with just two restaurants in a post office—now, after searching every day since I got my master's in June of 2022, we can't find one. I can't leave my house, get to my job, use the bathroom, dress myself or prepare a meal unless one of my parents is able to help me. They are both over 60, and a day is coming soon where neither of them can. When you can't leave your house, your mental health is non-existent. The days bleed together—any place that you didn't choose and can't leave at will becomes a prison.

Let's be clear: I am no more disabled now than I was when my future opened up in 2015. The only thing that has changed is the wages of these providers relative to other essential services. My disability did not create my isolation: your inaction, and the inaction of Congress, did. I know how to deal with my disability: there's a lift that gets me out of bed, pills to loosen my muscles, a chair that lets me move. I do not know how to deal with the possibility of your apathy, with the possibility that you use your freedom to decide that mine is too impractical or too expensive. I've only ever wanted to watch the latest John Wick, grab a cup of coffee with a friend, have a place to pee, and teach children to read

I told this same story to the subcommittee on health and human services last week, as my students watched. When I returned to school, my students couldn't believe how the panel responded. Representative Jean Schmidt waited until after *my mother* had testified, and then asked *her*, as I sat there, whether it would be okay to dump me in a house with a handful of other randomly-selected disabled people who could share a provider between us. She was quick to add that – here I'll quote – 'it even looks like a house'. I'll use the remainder of my time to address the representative directly.

Living in a group home means living with strangers and being cared for not by an aide I hired and could fire, but by strangers. If you struggle to think about me humanely, think of your daughter, Emilie. When she moved out, and your eyes misted, did she get to pick where to live, or did the state decide? Did she get to pick who to live with, or did the state decide? Now imagine, God forbid, that before starting her beautiful family, she'd lost the use of her legs. Which five strangers in this room would you pick to shower Emilee? Remember, if she was using an agency, she couldn't fire them if they failed to show up or were abusive. How much would you want the state to spend on a system that allowed her the dignity of living on her own, or with whomever she pleased? And if that dignity was at risk, and she said so, would you want her representatives to speak as if she wasn't in the room, already making compromises, or fight for her?

If you think these so-called choices are inhumane, so do I, and so did the Supreme Court in 1993, in *Olmstead v LC*, which recognized that under Title II of the ADA, stripping disabled people of their freedom to choose where to live was discriminatory, even when supposedly justified by a lack of funding.

I have testified five times now in this building, five since 2015, each time defending my ability to choose my own skilled providers. This time, my students are watching, waiting to see if this state brings justice to disabled people or demands once again that we accept compromises you yourself would never even entertain. The only way to keep us safe – the only way to make us free again – is to pay independent care providers \$20/hr. I am happy to take any questions about my own future.