

Testimony for Best Buddies in Ohio

Testimony at the Ohio State House in front of the full Finance Committee

Wednesday, April 19, 2022 at 9:00 a.m.

Room 313

Mallory DeTota

Hello. My name is Mallory DeTota and I am the Area Director for Best Buddies in Central Ohio, a state affiliate of Best Buddies International. Founded in 1989, Best Buddies is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide opportunities for one-to-one friendships, leadership development, integrated employment, and inclusive living for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities also known as IDD. Best Buddies' Ohio office opened in 2016. Currently, we deliver our unique inclusion programs to more than 1,500 Ohioans with and without disabilities through Best Buddies Chapters in 35 schools throughout the state.

Physical and social barriers inhibit interactions between students with IDD and their typical peers in the classroom or during informal situations such as the cafeteria or at lunchtime. Our time-tested friendship programs create a simple and effective pathway through these barriers, creating opportunities for meaningful social interactions. These increased opportunities have significant impact.

Additionally, participants with IDD in Best Buddies have increased social interactions in their school or community, increased involvement in activities with peers, and demonstrate improved social interactions. Participants without IDD become more aware that people with IDD can hold community-based jobs, support having neighbors with IDD, and are willing to work at a company that employs people with and without IDD.

Securing support from the state of Ohio would empower Best Buddies to fill a gap in school and community-based inclusion services offered to Ohioans. We seek an appropriation of \$250,000 each year of the biennium to double the amount of children and adults served through these programs. Overall, these funds would enable Best Buddies to serve 3,000 participants through 70 school-based Best Buddies chapters by the end of the biennium.

I am joined today by a Best Buddies participant; Alex Rogers and she would like to share how Best Buddies has impacted her.

Alex Rogers

Hi, my name is Alex Rogers. I am a member of the Best Buddies Friendship Chapter at Ohio State University. I went there for the last four years. I love Best Buddies because I have made friends and grown as a leader. One experience I'll never forget in 2018 was leading a webinar called Spread the Word to End the Word as part of a national campaign to end the use of the R-word and promote the inclusion of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. That same year I was the keynote speaker at the Best Buddies Champion of the Year Gala!

Now, I live on my own, and I have a job. I have made one of my best friends, Sharla Thomas. She is always there for me.

I went to the Best Buddies Leadership Conference in Bloomington, Indiana. I have worked on my public speaking skills. I have been able to speak at many events, and now I am serving as a leader at Best Buddies as an Advisory Board member so I can be an advocate to increase our programs in the state!

Ohio needs more Best Buddies chapters because everyone should have the chance to have these kinds of opportunities. Thank you very much.