

PARTNERS in Employment, Inc.

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Testimony on SFY 24/25 Operating Budget House Finance Health and Human Services Sub-Committee

Chairwoman Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and esteemed committee members,

I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Linsey Hollingshead and I am the Director of Operations of PARTNERS in Employment, Inc. We are located in Defiance, Ohio, serving the eight counties of Defiance, Fulton, Henry, Lucas, Paulding, Van Wert, Williams, and Wood. **We are a proud provider of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services funded by Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD).** Last year we provided services to 284 Ohioans with various disabilities, including intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental illness, physical disabilities, and more. Our entire organization employs 28 people. Approximately 22 of these employees provide VR services through OOD.

I am very supportive of the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Miller for Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD). I am very encouraged to see Ohio's leaders understand the importance of positioning Ohio as a leader in employment for individuals with disabilities. The changing workforce and accompanying shortage of workers threatens our ability to achieve our mission of helping Ohioans with disabilities find and keep great jobs. These budget initiatives, and the leadership of Director Miller, will support us to recruit and retain the staff needed to provide vital employment services to Ohioans with disabilities.

We are proud to offer a robust menu of OOD-funded job training services to the Ohioans with disabilities in our community. For high school students with disabilities, our agency provides Pre-Employment Transition Services and Summer Youth Services to reinforce work as an achievable goal. We help students with disabilities explore career opportunities, build friendships with coworkers, and increase their self-confidence in their abilities as they prepare to graduate.

For adults with disabilities, Partners in Employment provides Career Exploration, Job Development, Job Coaching, Retention services, and more. These help first establish career paths and then help the individuals take the steps to obtain a competitive job and learn how to excel in their job tasks.

A few Partners in Employment success stories:

Back in 2004, we helped an individual obtain a job in a shipping department. This involved creating multiple assistive devices and a modification in his schedule. He worked 2 hours a day, 5 days a week, prepping boxes and inserts so that items could be packaged more quickly. This man is still employed almost 19 years later, with one of the best attendance records of any employee they have. He talks of his job with pride and knows how his contribution makes a difference in the company.

In 2021, we helped an individual obtain a job right out of high school as a dishwasher at a bakery. While we were coaching her in learning her job tasks as a dishwasher, she expressed a desire in one day being

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a baker. We facilitated conversations with the owner, and she soon moved from dishwasher to assistant baker.

In Summer 2022, we met with a student, his parents, and an OOD counselor after the student had completed their Summer Youth Work Experience. The parents enthusiastically described how their high school student independently began setting their alarm, laying their clothes out the night before, and ensured they were ready for work each morning. They discussed how getting their child to school was a battle, but the excitement of going to work motivated the student to be more independent at home.

Our company employs roughly two-thirds of the staff that we did prior to the pandemic. Our current staff absolutely love what they do and who they work for, but we continue to struggle to attract new, qualified talent because we cannot pay competitively in this world of higher wages and higher inflation. We turn back individuals seeking employment, prematurely end services, and decrease the geographic area we serve due to our lack of staff.

As Director of Operations, I continuously work to reduce our overhead. This allows me to pass through the majority of any increase in OOD payment directly to my staff. OOD's previous fee schedule ran from October 2019 to September 2022. Core inflation between when the fees were set in 2019 and now is a total of 14.7%. OOD gave roughly a 3% overall increase in fees during this same period.

I applaud OOD's efforts in the most recent fee schedule increase as it was done with much openness and stakeholder collaboration, but there was a common theme in every discussion – "it's just not enough." OOD did the best they could within the constraints of their budget, which lead to tough discussions with my own staff about how we also were limited in our ability to give well-deserved raises.

I commend OOD for doing all they could and encourage the General Assembly to approve the Governor's budget proposal for OOD so that they can do more. With your leadership, together we can ensure these services are available to the Ohioans and the Ohio employers that so greatly need them!
Thank you again, for the opportunity and privilege to bring my concerns before you and if I can ever be of any help in this process, please let me know.



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