



110 Foss Way
Troy, OH 45373
937-335-5784
www.rtindustries.org

**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 Bonnie Stockstill and I am an Employment Services Coordinator with RT Industries, Inc. We are located in Troy, Ohio. Our organization is able to serve any county in Ohio but are actively serving Miami County and five local counties. We are an organization that provides Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services funded by Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) for upwards to fifty (50) school aged students through aging adults monthly of Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Our entire organization employs just over one-hundred (100) people. Approximately ten (10) 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). The changing labor landscape and accompanying shortage of workers, including job coaches, threatens our ability to achieve our mission of helping people with disabilities find desired jobs in their communities. These budget initiatives, and the leadership of Director Miller, will support us to recruit and retain the staff needed to continue to provide vital employment services to Ohioans with Developmental Disabilities. Attached is an example of the great work RT Industries' employment staff accomplished through services and funding from OOD.

RT Industries primary focus is helping people with disabilities gain and maintain employment in competitive integrated employment. Our organization provides support to transition age students and adults. We provide services from Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) through On-the-Job Supports (OTJS). We also assist with job retention (Tier III) to follow-along for three months after job stabilization has been determined to ensure job satisfactory from both the employer and the person receiving the OOD service. Many of the transition students who have received Summer Youth services and Pre-ETS have continued with RT Industries for job development (Tier I).

Increased funding is necessary to not only maintain employees within our organization to provide OOD services, but also to continue to guide and assist future employees of community businesses. The current reimbursement rates do not allow organizations to pay Employment Specialists competitive wages. Often, Employment Specialists are assisting people to gain employment with higher wages than RT Industries is able to compensate them. A recent example is that an Employment Specialist making \$13.50 per hour assisted a person obtain a position making \$18.25 per hour to work in a factory at a machine. By

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no means is factory work degrading or less than other positions; however, as having been a previous Employment Specialist before my promotion, it requires much mental work and a significant amount of flexibility. An additional example is a person can wash dishes at one of our local hospitals and be offered \$15 per hour to start whereas Employment Specialists with our non-profit organization start at \$13 per hour.

Since Employment Specialists follow the person receiving the service, there are times when they work first, second, or third shift with the person. I personally had to work on Christmas one year to assist a person with their new job. Employment Specialists perform significantly important work in supporting persons with disabilities no matter the holiday or time of day.

We encourage the General Assembly to approve the Governor's budget proposal for OOD.

With your leadership, together we can ensure these services are available to the Ohioans 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.**


Bonnie Stockstill
bonnie.stockstill@rtindustries.org
110 Foss Way Troy, OH 45373
(937) 335-5784 ext. 110



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RT Industries Partnership

With funding from OOD, RT Industries is able to provide Summer Youth (SY) and Pre-ETS services to transition age students. SY provides real world work experience that can be included on a future resume. Pre-ETS educates students on soft and hard skills necessary for future employment. We currently provide Pre-ETS for students in Upper Valley Career Center's LAUNCH program students as well as students at other area schools.



Summer Youth allows students to gain employment skills while working at one of RT's local business partners. During the summer of 2022, groups experienced work at a factory, a YMCA, and a non-profit organization. Years previously, students worked at a bowling alley, a hotel, a mall, and a park service. With funds from OOD, RT is able to compensate students while they work to gain and build upon skills.

Pre-ETS service has five subcategories ranging from self-advocacy to workplace readiness training. Most students complete several of the subcategories before moving into Job Development, and students can receive Pre-ETS up to their 22nd birthday. Since beginning to provide the service in 2020, RT has been able to support several students who have later moved into Job Development (Tier I) to search for integrated employment.



We wouldn't be able to provide these supports to transition age students, the future workforce, without partnership with Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities.