



**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 Chandra Thompson, and I am the Community Engagement and Operations Director **of** RT Industries, Inc. **and we are located in** Troy, Ohio. **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 great 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 this year through services and funding from OOD.

RT Industries primary focus is helping people with disabilities secure and maintain competitive employment. Our organization supports school-aged students with Pre-ETS and Summer Youth services. With adults, our supports range from Community-Based Assessments (CBAs) to on-the-job support such as Job Coaching. Statistics show that there is a huge gap between those who are employed with a disability vs. those who do not have a disability. Employment for those with disabilities means greater financial self-sufficiency, an opportunity to utilize their skills, a sense of purpose and accomplishment and more active participation in community life.

Funding is the top barrier for providing employment services to people with disabilities. Increased funding is an absolute necessity for employee retention. With the current reimbursement rates, our Employment Specialists are providing employment supports in businesses that offer a higher rate of pay than we can pay our employees.

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.**

Chandra Thompson

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RT Industries Partnership

Check out RT's partnership with the local hospital, Upper Valley Medical Center (UVMC) and career technology school, Upper Valley Career Center (UVCC)!

Launch is a one-year, high school transition program for individuals with disabilities to provide training and education leading to community employment.

This program serves as a workforce alternative for young adults (ages 18-22) who defer their diploma and are in their last year of high school. Applicants gain admission into the program through a selection committee process.

The cornerstone of the Launch program is total immersion in a large business. The Upper Valley Career Center accomplishes this, thanks to the on-going collaboration between professionals, interns, and their families.



RT provides an Employment Specialist to provide this on-site support to help students gain work experience and trials various jobs at UVMC during their internship. The Employment Specialist teaches students employment skills to be successful in the future.

We wouldn't be able to provide these supports to students heading into the workforce without our partnership with Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities.

