



ECHOING HILLS

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 the opportunity to be heard and you taking the time to read my testimony.

My name is Michelle Copher and I am the Program Director at Echoing Hills of Southwest Ohio, we are located in Dayton Ohio. We are an organization that provides care, love, support, companionship and so much more to individuals with intellectual disabilities in an intermediate care facilities, residential day, and community-based waiver program administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). Our team of over 150 employees are proud to provide essential services to over 80 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities

I am very supportive of the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Hauck for DODD. The changing labor landscape and accompanying shortage of workers, including direct support professionals (DSP), threatens our ability to provide the critical supports on which the people we serve and their families rely.

There are many other places that pay their employees so much more. Not to take away from fast food restaurant workers their jobs are extremely important and they have a lot to deal with however for us we are entrusted with someone's sister, mother, father, brother. The life of our individuals is put into our hands. We strive every day to give them the best care we can. When there is not enough staff it makes it difficult to give each individual the attention they need and deserve. If we could hire more staff and give them a proper wage we could help make the lives of the individuals that much greater. Staff would be more inclined to stay. DSPs go through a lot on a daily basis. Being a DSP is not for anyone. The people you care for become family and for some individuals a DSP is all the family they have. So when a DSP has to leave and find a better paying job that affects the individuals. It's like losing a member of your family. That individual may feel as though their family is abandoning them again. That DSP may feel as though they are leaving someone they truly cared for. For some people this is not just a job but it is their life.

It is very important for a DSP to feel appreciated. Parents of the individuals we serve trust that we are doing right by their loved one. Most parents are feeling guilty that they had to place their loved one in a facility. So it's up to DSPs to show that we are capable of taking care of their individual. It gives them some comfort in the difficult decision they had to make but when we are constantly having to find new staff because they can't support their families it's hard on the parents. Their loved one has no stability.



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The Governor's proposed budget initiatives, guided by the leadership of Director Hauck, is a great foundation to reinforce and rebuild the services provided by Echoing Hills. We encourage this subcommittee to approve the Governor's budget proposal for DODD and to invest additional dollars into these vital services to raise direct support professional wages to at least an average of \$20.64. This investment will help us recruit and retain the workforce needed to continue to provide our quality services.

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.

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