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Shelby Rhodes, Executive Director
"Community Supports for Citizens with Disabilities"

3/10/23

Re: Testimony on SFY 24/25 Operating Budget

To: House Finance Health and Human Services Sub-Committee

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Shelby Rhodes and I serve as the Executive Director of HAVAR, Incorporated. We are located in South-eastern Ohio, and serve in three counties (Athens, Washington, and Meigs); we serve approximately ninety individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. We provide care and supervision in homes and in the community, as well as employment services and day habilitation through the home and community-based waiver program) administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). Our team of one hundred and twenty employees are proud to provide essential services to these 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.

Our field began at a time when it was realized the living conditions in institutions were unacceptable (due to high instances of neglect, abuse, low standards, etc.). Individuals diagnosed with a developmental disability were forced to live in such environments, as no alternatives were available up until the late 60's / early 70's. Our own agency was formed to provide such an alternative. HAVAR, Inc. made history as the first agency of this type in both Athens and Washington Counties, incorporating in 1972 (over fifty years ago).



It's vital for the legacy of quality care to continue. We should never have to return to the days of warehousing human beings as a result of inadequate funding, and we hope you'll agree.

Staff providing care must be afforded a living wage commiserate with the important work that they do. And we, as an agency, must be able to afford our utilities and costs of doing business, as well as paying for such fundamental benefits as health care for our staff. Costs only increase, and to stay afloat, we require a rate increase more than ever. We must be able to afford starting wages in order to attract new staff in an effort to provide relief to our already overworked staff. It is not uncommon for us to experience 400+ hours of overtime in a week's time.

There is also no way for the disabled individuals we serve to get the quality of service they deserve if we are constantly understaffed. *Please help us to help them.*

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 (your agency). 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 feel free to reach out to me.

Sincerely,

Shelby Rhodes
Executive Director
srhodes@havar.org

