

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 testify before you today.

My name is Lass Kanneh, and I am the P.E.A.C.E. Day Program Manager of Independence of Portage County, Inc. We are a nonprofit organization providing Intermediate Care Facilities (ICF); Adult Day Services (ADS); residential support; and employment opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities in Ravenna, Ohio, through the home and community-based waiver program administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD).

Our diverse team of well-trained and dedicated Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) is vital to providing essential services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Being an African immigrant and DSP, I can assure you that DSPs are an integral part of the DD community; however, our workforce in post-pandemic is experiencing a grave crisis impacted by low wages, shortage of staff, ongoing stress, and exhaustion. Therefore, I greatly support the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Hauck for the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD).

The supportive services we DSPs provide to individuals in the DD community are critically important for their personal well-being, skills development, and community inclusion, as well as reducing emotional stress for their families. Ensuring adequate funding for our industry will strengthen its effort to remain competitive by recruiting and retaining people needed to support our DD community across Ohio. Such funding will also increase wages and appropriate benefits for us [DSPs] to cover our living expenses, including health and childcare. Our individuals matter! We DSPs matter! We need our county and state leadership to support the importance of our industry by providing adequate funding to empower DSPs to stay focused on delivering quality services to our DD community.

Meanwhile, the Governor's proposed budget initiatives, guided by Director Hauck's leadership, are a great foundation for reinforcing and rebuilding the services provided by Independence of Portage County, Inc. On behalf of my fellow DSPs, I 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 Professionals' wages to at least an average of \$20.64. This investment will help Independence of Portage County, Inc. to recruit, retain, and provide support to its workforce needed to continue providing quality services to our individuals with developmental disabilities. Together with your leadership, 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.

Very Truly Yours,

Lass Kanneh, Day Program Manager

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Paths to Enrichment, Activity, Creativity, and Enterprise (P.E.A.C.E.)

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