

Testimony on HB 33
Christine Brown
3/14/2023

Chairwoman Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, good morning.

My name is Christine Brown. I live in Franklin County. I am on the board of the Ohio Self Determination Association and work part time as a clinical research assistant at the Ohio State University, Nisonger Center. I also receive services in the DD System and have since 1998. I am appearing today in my capacity as someone with knowledge of the Department of DD and direct support professionals, and my testimony should not be attributed to Ohio State. I am here to ask you to support the budget request for funds to increase wages of direct support professionals or DSPs to \$20/hour.

I live in my own apartment and have faced a lot of challenges in the last 5 years, especially because of the DSP Workforce Crisis. I require 16 hours of DSP support each week due to my disability. I have Autism, am legally blind and require medication to prevent seizures. Due to the blindness, I am not able to sort my meds and fill my medbox, cannot see to cook and clean, and cannot drive. To get support in my home for 16 hours each week, I have had to go from one agency to two agencies. At this time each agency can only cover 8 hours each, because of their gigantic turnover rate. There have been weeks when I had to go as long as three days with no staff. By the 4th day my anxiety increases, which can cause seizures.

Early results from a recent study by the LEND program at the Ohio State University Nisonger Center show that DSPs do not stay in this field for many reasons, but mostly because of low pay. Many DSPs work over 40 hours and still struggle to earn a living wage. DSPs also report a lack of support from upper management and poor working conditions, such as not being able to leave on time due to staffing shortages. At times not being able to leave, means that another person with a disability is without staff.

We need to make the system better so more people stay in this field. Most DSPs reported in the study that they feel lucky to work in the disability field and love their work, but they are considering changing jobs to work in food service or retail, where they would make more money. DSPs would also be more likely to stay if tuition reimbursement was a possibility, especially since there are no opportunities for career advancement.

This crisis in the DSP workforce can be addressed with your support of the budget request for funds to increase wages of direct support professionals or DSPs to a statewide average of \$20 per hour.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. I will be happy to answer any questions.