

Testimony on SFY 24/25 Operating Budget
House Finance Health and Human Services Sub-Committee

Chairwoman Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and committee members,

I want to thank you for the opportunity to be speaking before you today. My name is Pam Drakeford and I am the Lead DSP at the home where Dan lives that his parents just spoke of. I have worked in the field for 24 years with the last 15 years being at Open Door. I have been working with Dan consistently since 2016.

As a DSP at Dan's home, I enjoy supporting him to have quality of life. Each day, we work to increase his independence, learn to say words, and help him build relationships. I am responsible for giving him his medications, providing total support with personal care, planning and cooking meals according to his diet, monitoring his seizures, and keeping his house clean and laundry done. Also, it is important that we are always aware of Dan's body language since he does not communicate a lot verbally. We must closely monitor him and look for cues that show that he may be having a health issue. Many times, his increase in behavior challenges (such as hitting, kicking, etc) are related to trying to communicate that he is not feeling well. We also, along with his parents assist Dan with activities, family events and vacations, and with his love for trains.

The Strengs have taken care of Dan his entire life, often without any breaks. When I started in his home, they were setting it up so that they knew Dan would have a home and services after they were not able to care for him or are not around anymore. At that time, I never dreamed the real issue would be that there would not be enough DSPs to support his needs.

The rate that supports the DSP wages and benefits is not enough for my co-workers and I to even take care of our basic needs. Over the years, I have worked up to 40 hours of overtime a week, worked multiple jobs, including starting my own floral business, and catering just to make ends meet. In this recent year, I have had some major health issues, lost my mother, and have had family emergencies that have made my daughter and son demand that I stop working as much. During this time, the other staff, Diamond, was due to have baby and would also not be able to work. After trying all ways to hire and keep DSPs at Dan's home, Open Door had to state that we could no longer continue serving Dan. This was very hard for me and for our company.

The county board and family interviewed multiple providers and trained many potential DSPs without success. Diamond and I rearranged our shift and our company met with SSA and family to create a plan where we would cover all shifts, except for the evening shift, which would be done by another provider. We just could not imagine Dan going without services. Both of his parents had health concerns that needed addressed, as well.

Now that I have cut my hours back to work 40 hours a week with some overtime, I cannot even afford to pay rent and often do not have enough money to even put gas in my car. Even with continuing to work my own business on top of DSP hours, I am barely making it. I do not live in a great neighborhood, the crime is bad, but I cannot even dream of moving because of the increased cost of housing. I pay \$850 a month in rent and other houses and apartments I have looked at cost over \$1500 a month! I love the work I do and know that our work is so important, but I cannot continue to struggle to meet my basic needs. Many DSPs have left the field for positions with starting pay well over \$20 that are a lot less work.

The budget outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Hauck for DODD are so very important to the services that I provide.

The proposed budget is a great starting point to help with building supports and services. I encourage approval of the Governor's budget proposal for DODD and investing additional dollars into these vital services to raise direct support professional wages to at least an average of \$20 per hour. This will help me and others like me who love the work we do, but are forced to live in poverty or work 2-3 jobs to maintain basic needs in our lives.

Thank you again, for allowing me to share concerns before this committee.

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