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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 Rebecca Sharp and I am the Executive Director of Open Door. Open Door currently employs over 400 employees who provide residential, nursing, day, employment, transportation, and creative services for around 500 adults with developmental disabilities in Franklin and Union counties. For the past 28 years at Open Door, I have had the amazing opportunity to inspire life journeys, first as a Direct Support Professional, then in various other roles until 2013 when I became the Executive Director. Our vision of cultivating valued roles for all people reflects the importance of quality services that enhance the lives of individuals with IDD and supports their full integration within their chosen communities.

I am very supportive of the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Hauck for DODD.

As you have heard from others throughout budget testimony, the ability to inspire life journeys and the quality of Ohio's DD system of supports and services has been greatly impacted by the Direct Support Professional workforce crisis. The ability to provide essential services and supports that promote health, safety, access, and inclusivity rely heavily on a qualified workforce.

As stated in the recent release of ANCOR's The Case for Inclusion 2023- "The DSP workforce crisis can be largely attributed to stagnant funding. The underinvestment in Medicaid has led to decades of stagnant funding and providers struggle to pay wages to DSPs that are competitive with other hourly- wage industries. The crisis is only getting worse accelerating the denial or delay of access to quality and available services for people with IDD" and "damaging the structure and integrity of community-based services."

In fact, the data of just our agency alone reflects the critical nature of the DSP workforce impact:

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- In 2022, 383 requests for services from individuals and families have been turned away due to staffing capacity in home and community-based services and 41 requests for admission in our Intermediate Care Facilities have been declined due to ability to provide needed services with current level of staffing
- Since 2019 (pre-pandemic), we have decreased the total number of individuals that we support by 142. Many of them in employment, transportation, and day services that we cannot fully open back up due to staffing related issues and costs of business. We have also been forced to give notice and or stop serving five residential sites since 2020 due to lack of staffing.
- The total number of employees has consistently and significantly decreased from year to year for the past 4 years
- Without additional funding increases that adequately support competitive wages and benefits, our agency will be forced to discontinue services at many locations over the next 18-24 months and strongly consider closing entirely shortly thereafter due to combination of workforce shortage and depletion of company reserves while trying to provide competitive wages and benefits.

Unfortunately, the data above would not be much different if you questioned other providers throughout all regions of our state.

Each of these statistics are not just numbers on this paper, they represent real people, real lives, that are affected by this crisis. The bottom line is that individuals and their families are going without needed supports while they either sit on a waiting list or experience a reduction of hours due to workforce crisis. Furthermore, the overall quality of services is suffering due to the reduced workforce and heavy burden on current staff to make up difference through overtime and heavier workloads. Many individuals are left without a viable for option for care forcing them to go into other more restrictive environments or their families absorbing 24/7 responsibility of care. In Ohio, many of the family caregivers are also aging and are becoming or will become unable to provide the important services required for their loved one.

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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 Open Door. **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 per hour. 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! I thank you again Chairwoman Carruthers and Ranking Member Liston and members of this committee for listening to Ohioans impacted by the DSP workforce crisis.

As you will hear from those sharing their life stories after this, it is so vital that we address this existential issue surrounding our DD system in Ohio. You will be hearing more details that show the true impact of the numbers contained above in the lives of Ohioans. Now, for the story about Dan from the perspective of his greatest advocates- his parents, the Lead DSP at his home, and from his Service and Support Administrator from Union County. Open Door has provided services for Dan since 2013 while he is working at UCO Industries and in his home since 2014.

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