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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 Bonnie Stockstill and I am an Employment Services Coordinator with RT Industries, and we are located in Troy Ohio, serving Miami, Shelby, Darke, Auglaize & Montgomery Counties. We are an organization that provides day, and employment services through the home and community-based waiver program administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). Our team of thirty (30) Direct Support Professionals are proud to provide essential services to over one hundred fifty (150) Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities each month.

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 of which the people we serve and their families rely.

We have been in a staffing crisis even before the pandemic began due to the low reimbursement rates of services. RT and other provider businesses cannot compete with the wages for-profit businesses offer with the reimbursement rates as they currently are. High quality staff have left RT because they can receive higher wages at another business such as a factory or a restaurant. The starting wages RT is able to offer also deters people from applying when, as stated in the previous sentence, they can go somewhere else for a higher wage. Without staff we cannot provide the much needed services to persons with disabilities in their communities.

From my many years spent in the field, I have learned that people are people no matter if they have a disability diagnosis. Everyone deserves the choice to live their best life. RT and other providers help people with disabilities do just that. From providing services that allow people to experience their community and have fun while doing it to obtaining and maintaining employment plus much more in between, the goal is to help persons with disabilities experience life and learn skills like everyone else. Without an increase in reimbursement rates, there will continue to be a decline in staffing. The staffing decline will lead to providers closing leaving persons served with little to no options for service providers to assist them. Families and natural supports rely on providers as a way for their loved ones to experience the world outside of home and as a means of respite for 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 RT Industries **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.**

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to confidently work, interact and thrive in the community.*

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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 let me know.**

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