



THE SOCIETY FOR HANDICAPPED CITIZENS
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**Testimony on SFY 24/25 Operating Budget
House Finance Health and Human Services Sub-Committee**

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**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 Shelly Wharton and I am the Associate Executive Director of The Society for Handicapped Citizens of Medina County, Inc. In 2023 we celebrate our 70th year as an agency providing services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We provide services in Medina, Ashland, Huron and Wayne counties that include residential (intermediate care and homemaker personal care), respite and short term stays, adult day services and camp administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). Our team of 144 employees is proud to provide essential services to over 180 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities

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 on which our the people we serve and their families rely.

Due to the low reimbursement rates we have struggled to attract and retain qualified staff. The rates do not allow us to provide wages and benefits commensurate with the requirements of the direct support professional position. We believe a wage that is competitive is \$20.64/hour. We have had to close five home and community-based services locations due to the inability to attract staff to this rewarding field without appropriate compensation for the work they are asked to do. We are watching the remaining home and community based service locations closely and anticipate having to close others. We continue to have to turn people away in our communities in need of services, primarily due to the inability to provide the required staff needed to ensure their health and safety. There are too many other jobs that pay more, provide better benefits and are not as demanding. That being said, there are few that are more rewarding or important.

The individuals we serve require the support of others to eat, drink, dress, bathe, toilet, move, manage emotions, communicate, engage in their environments and communities, for transportation, getting to appointments, managing finances, cooking, grocery shopping, cleaning and laundry. They require these supports to live their life. When we can provide these necessary supports their family members can be just that – family. They can continue to work in their jobs and support our economy and other family members knowing we are supporting their loved one.

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 The Society. **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.**

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.

Shelly Wharton

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