



**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 Melinda Kale and I am the CEO of Work Leads to Independence and we are located in Bowling Green Ohio in Wood County, and we provide services in 6 counties. We are an organization that provides Adult Day Services, Employment Services, Non-Medical Transportation, Group Employment Services, Individual Employment Services, Career Planning and Voc Habilitation administered by the Departmental of Development Disabilities (DODD). Our team of 30 employees are proud to provide essential services to approximately 150 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 the people we serve and their families rely.

In the current workforce crisis, it has ironically created employment opportunities for the people that we support in Employment Services. The employment of these individuals helps support the public sector businesses in their workforce crisis and the trickledown effect of these individuals' employment is less need of public assistance funds for them and they in turn become tax contributors. Unfortunately, due to not being able to offer competitive wages for support staff, we then are unable to provide the services needed for the individuals to be successful in these opportunities.

Another one of our services, Day Programming, is also affected by the inability to provide competitive wages. Unlike the public sector businesses, it is not an option for us to reduce hours or close for a day. Staffing needed for the level of care that is to be provided, is jeopardized by us not being able to provide competitive wages, based on the current waiver rates. These rates are out of alignment for the essential services that we provide for the health and safety of these individuals. We need to be able to provide realistic wages to those that provide this high level of quality care.

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 Work Leads to Independence. 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.

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