

**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 Anthony Kukura, and I am the Strategy Associate of Programs at Koinonia Homes. Koinonia Homes is a nonprofit organization that provides whole person, community based, care to IDD (intellectual and developmental disabilities) individuals. Koinonia has a wide-reaching presence throughout northeast Ohio. We operate over 60 homes throughout the region, allowing the individuals we serve to continue to reside in and be contributing members of the communities they know as home. This model of care is utilized throughout the state of Ohio, and it is a more sustainable and economical alternative to other methods of long-term care. This model has allowed IDD Ohioans to live longer and healthier lives. Our team of over 450 employees are proud to provide essential services to over 350 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.

Many factors have caused our industry to enter a crisis level position, however COVID-19 further exacerbated a funding problem that has plagued our industry for many years. To remain a competitive employer, Koinonia has had to raise its rates of pay beyond the rate of reimbursement we receive from Medicaid.

Working in this industry is a calling, and one that everyone who works at this organization feels personally. Adults with IDD deserve to live in and be a part of their own communities. They deserve a life of dignity and respect. The services we provide throughout the northeast Ohio community are essential, and in fact our model is more economically responsible than alternatives such as nursing homes and large institutions. My mother was a special education teacher for many years. I grew up understanding that everyone, regardless of disability, deserves a chance to be a contributing member of their community. When the opportunity presented itself to work at an organization like Koinonia, I knew it was where I was meant to end up. Organizations like Koinonia have greatly enhanced the lives of the IDD population in Ohio, and because of the support we provide, IDD adults are living longer and healthier lives.

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 Koinonia. 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 an 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! 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.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anthony B. Kukura". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "A".

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