

**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 Heidi Spaeth and I am a Residential manager of Koinonia , and we are located in Independence Ohio in Cuyahoga County ,serving several counties throughout Northeast Ohio . We are an organization that provides residential, day, and employment services to over 350 people 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.

I've worked in the field of Developmental Disabilities for the past 29 years. I worked for Hattie Larlham in the beginning of my career, mostly at the main campus location (Hattie Larlham Center for Children with Disabilities) in Mantua, Ohio in Portage County. I saw first-hand the positive difference that service locations such as these provide to families who are unable to care for their medically fragile and developmentally disabled children by themselves. With a physician, nurse practitioner, nurses, respiratory therapist and direct support professionals on staff, these children had a home with all the medical care that they need so they were not shunted back and forth to hospitals to get the medical and specialized care they needed. They had a quality of life for however long or short their life was. I know I made a difference in the lives of many families and the children and adults in our care for the 15 years that I was employed there. I unfortunately was laid off however due to budget constraints. I am just one of many that were laid off through the years due to the difficult budget dilemmas that IDD providers face.

I have been employed by Koinonia for the past 13 years. The labor shortage has affected us as it has throughout all of Ohio in every type of business. The most difficult reality however, is that we have minimal staffing levels that HAVE to be met to provide health and safety to the adults whom we have the privilege to serve. We cannot reduce our staffing levels simply because we do not have anyone to come in to work. The individuals need care every day.. on Christmas when most staff want to be with their OWN families .. on a Saturday morning when many parents wish they could see their own children play sports.. at night when many staff wish they could spend it in their own bed.. we are working to care for the individuals. Since we do not have enough direct support professionals, supervisory and management staff have to fill in the gaps in the schedule and work direct care in addition to the important work that they must also complete to keep us within Medicaid and Department of Developmental Disability regulations. The reality is that we have a lot of very tired staff doing the best we can to keep our individuals safe. There is so much more that we could do, however, to enrich their lives but we simply do not have the manpower to do so. I am asking for your help so we can reach our goal and give these Ohioans the quality of life that they deserve.

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 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! **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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