

Rajai Saleh
House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
Interested Party Testimony, HB 33
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Chairperson Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB33. My name is Rajai Saleh and I am the Secretary of the Ohio Olmstead Task Force (OOTF), and I serve on the Board of the Ohio Statewide Independent Living Council (OSILC). I am also a disabled individual who lives in the community. I am here to testify on my own behalf as interested party in support of increasing wages for direct care workers and nurses in Home and community-based Services.

As a person with a physical disability with limited mobility, I require assistance in all of my personal care needs. This includes dressing, bathing, preparing food, cleaning, etc. Without a personal care assistant or without any support, I would literally have to live in a nursing home because I cannot provide care for myself. However, that is not the life I would choose. Living in a nursing home would feel like living in a prison. I want to have control over my own life; including when I get up, when I eat, when I go to bed, where I go out, how I spend my money, etc. You get the picture. Nursing homes don't allow patients to have control over these things. It's sad that many are forced into nursing homes because of lack of care in the community in this day and age. I have friends who are at risk of being placed in a nursing home because they cannot find care. I'm lucky that my personal care aide also lives with me, but if for some reason he wouldn't be able to provide care for me, I would also be at risk of going to a nursing home.

There are many ways to fix this. One of the ways is to increase wages for direct care workers. Direct care workers are essential to our well-being. Anyone can become disabled and may need personal care assistance, including our elderly loved ones! I recommend wages to be increased to an average of \$16 to \$20 an hour. According to rentdata.org, the average rent in Columbus, Ohio in 2023 is about \$1,163 a month for a two-bedroom (<https://www.rentdata.org/columbus-oh-hud-metro-fmr-area/2023>), and it keeps going up every year! With inflation rising, we need to match that and more. There are many benefits to increasing wages; including getting people off of welfare which would save the state a lot of money. It actually also saves the state money if people are allowed to live in their own homes instead of nursing homes. Not only would it save on administrative costs, but it also allows people with disabilities to work and pay taxes, and in turn contribute to society. It's difficult to keep direct care workers because it's easier to make more money in other professions. Many are single mothers and are living paycheck to paycheck. Several have been struggling lately because of a glitch in the new billing system which caused many to go without pay for several weeks. This should not have happened and has only made the direct workforce crisis worse. Another way to help fix the direct care workforce crisis is for Ohio to create a commission focused on monitoring long-term direct care workforce issues. This commission could issue regular reports that include current Ohio specific data along with implementing systemic solutions. The office should focus on streamlining complex administrative systems that create barriers for care workers.

There are many issues that need to be fixed, but increasing the wages would be a step in the right direction. I encourage you to consider this. Chairperson Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony and I welcome any questions the committee may have. I will also be happy to be contacted for any follow-up and my contact information below is listed below.

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