

My name is Christine Brown. I live in Franklin County. I am an individual who is on the Franklin County board of DD Self Advocate Advisory Council, and work part time as a clinical research assistant at the Ohio State University, Nisonger Center. I also receive services in the DD System and have since 1998. I am here to ask you to support the budget request of the Ohio Department of DD, For funds to increase wages of direct support professionals or DSPs.

I am appearing today in my capacity as an individual with knowledge of the Department of DD and direct support professionals. None of my testimony today should be attributed to Ohio State.

I live in my own apartment and have faced a lot of challenges in the last 5 years, especially because of the DSP Workforce Crisis. I require 16 hours of DSP support each week due to my disability. I have Autism, am legally blind and require medication to prevent seizures. Due to the blindness, I am not able to sort my meds and fill my med box, cannot see to cook and clean, and cannot drive. To get support in my home for 16 hours each week, I have had to go from one agency to two agencies. At this time each agency can only cover 8 hours each, because of their gigantic turnover rate. There have been weeks when I had to go as long as three days with no staff. By the 4th day my anxiety increases, which can cause seizures.

Early results from a recent study by the LEND program at the Ohio State University Nisonger Center, show that DSPs do not stay in this field for many reasons, but mostly because of low pay. Many DSPs work over 40 hours and still struggle to earn a living wage. DSPs also report a lack of support from upper management and poor working conditions, such as not being able to leave on time due to staffing shortages. At times not being able to leave, means that another person with a disability is without staff.

We need to make the system better so more people stay in this field. Most DSPs reported in the study that they feel lucky to work in the disability field and love their work, but they are considering changing jobs to work in food service or retail, where they would make more money. DSPs would also be more likely to stay if tuition reimbursement was a possibility, especially since there are no opportunities for career advancement.

This crisis in the DSP workforce is a crisis of itself and can be addressed with your support of the budget request of the Ohio Department of DD. for funds to increase wages of direct support professionals or DSPs. The House got it to \$18.00 but My friends and I feel our staff deserve \$20 a hour the same they get paid in the Developmental Center

Thank you

Christine A Brown

Founding member of the Self Advocate Advisory Council of Franklin County board of DD