

Testimony to the Ohio Senate Finance Committee

Chairman Dolan, Vice-Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Finance Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I'd also like to thank Governor DeWine for his increased budget and to the Ohio Finance Committee for their proposed budget for an increase in pay for Direct Support Professionals in Ohio.

My name is Mary Nix. I am here testifying on behalf of myself and my sister Margie. My sister Margie is an individual with disabilities who currently lives in an Ohio Intermediate Care Facility. She has been there since August 2020.

Margie lived all of her life with our parents, and then with my husband and I after our parents died. Caring for her was manageable when she was healthy, but in April 2019 she was hospitalized with septic shock, pneumonia, and kidney failure.

At this time Margie began needing significantly more help with basic daily tasks, which fell mostly on me to help her complete. The rest of 2019 her health grew worse and she needed even more assistance. In February 2020 Margie was hospitalized again and transferred to a nursing home as she required 24/7 care.

After her stay in the nursing home, Margie was transferred to Welcome House's Michael T. George Intermediate Care Facility. Due to Covid lockdown, my husband and I were unable to help her move. It was an adjustment as I'd agreed to care for Margie for the rest of my life, but now I had to trust someone else to care for her. ALL DURING COVID.

The Direct support professionals, manager and director helped Margie and I to adjust. They helped her get used to her new home, feel safe and loved. They provided me with comfort, wisdom, and the assurance I needed to cope with this change all while NOT seeing Margie or entering her new home for several months due to Covid.

My sister does get great care, and she is living a life she loves and that I never dreamed possible. But I worry about how long staff will last. Will they be forced to choose a different career because the pay is so low they are unable to pay for basic needs, car repairs, and child care. Retaining the right staff is essential to ensure individuals receive the highest quality care.

Direct support professionals deserve a decent wage for the incredible, but hard work they do. Adequate salaries must be offered to attract and keep direct support professionals.

There are so many other families like ours who rely on direct support professionals. We are in every community and know that some of your colleagues in the Senate share our experiences. Services like the ones provided by Welcome House are indispensable for our families who are no longer able to provide the level of care our siblings or children need.

I remember hearing from my mom years ago about the days when those with disabilities often lived in deplorable conditions, sharing toothbrushes, living nearly naked. My mother worked with others to shut down those institutions and she came to these halls many times as an advocate for those with developmental disabilities. My mother was also a cofounder of Welcome House in 1972.

We must continue to move forward for individuals with disabilities by providing higher pay for direct support professionals. We must not risk turning back the clock 50 years and undoing all the good so many like my mom, Welcome House and other organizations have fought so hard for.

I am here today because I back Ohio organizations serving people with disabilities who are advocating for a \$445 million increase in GRF beyond what the Governor has proposed. This increase in Medicaid funds would enable these organizations to raise the hourly wage to \$20 an hour for direct support professional who support people with developmental disabilities.

Thank you.

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