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**Testimony on HB 33
Senate Finance Committee**

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and esteemed committee members,

I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Jo Spargo and I am the Executive Director of REM Ohio Inc, and we are located in 40 Counties across the state of Ohio. REM Ohio provides intermediate care facilities for individuals with intellectual disabilities and residential, day, and employment services through the home and community-based waiver program administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). Our team of 981 employees are proud to provide essential services to 909 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

I am very supportive of the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Hauck for DODD and very appreciative of the additional investments adopted by the House of Representatives in House Bill 33.

REM Ohio has provided services in Ohio for over 35 years. In that time, we have had strong goals to grow our services and be at the forefront of innovative supports and strategies. We learned early on that using the right approach and teaching people that they could trust their staff, that staff were a dependable and stable force in their lives, allowed us to give them a feeling of safety and stability. As individuals feel safe and trusting, they will often need less supports. It has always been our desire to impact people, enrich their lives and make them better. Until recently we have been able to achieve this and grow this impact year after year, impacting over 1400 people annually.

When the staffing crisis first hit, we believed it would be temporary. Unfortunately, we have now found that the crisis has amplified and has become worse than we ever believed was possible. Although we have strived to maintain the continued quality of care during this time, we do find ourselves having to be flexible with workforce behaviors, such as call offs, tardiness, and such. Each of these work behaviors from staff leads to less feeling of safety and security in the people we support.

The last 2-3 years are the first time since opening our doors that we have seen a decrease in the supports we are able to offer. The amount of individuals we currently support has decreased by over 30 as our ability to hire staff has decreased. We are very limited in the amount of referrals we can take, are unable to support people 1:1 for needs in their personal and family homes, and have seen a significant decrease in the overall amounts of new and innovative supports we can create or deliver. All due to the lack of qualified employees we are able to recruit and hire.

I have spoken so far of my professional position in the DD arena. I am also blessed to be the mom of an 18 year old young man who struggles with special needs. As a provider, I have spent the last 37 years advocating for people with DD across the state, working to make services better, planning every year to bring services to the next level of what this population needs. As a Mom for the last 17 years, I have been enveloped by a passion, a drive, to

know that I MUST make these services better. I MUST leave these services ready to meet the needs of this population in this changing world so that Ohio leads the nation even after I am gone. As soon as my son came home (he is adopted) my advocacy grew to the next level. I began volunteering, I applied and was appointed to the Governors DD Council where I served for 7 years, 3 as the chair. I traveled annually to DC where I visited our congressional delegation to keep these issues at the forefront.

After years of being hopeful and knowing things would be OK when I would no longer be here for my son, I look at the DD system and no longer feel confident in that hope. My friends, who also have children with special needs, tell me stories of not being able to get services. I receive multiple referrals in my email every week for individuals and families in need and I know we cannot help them. I have staff who are dedicated to their jobs, but tell us they cannot continue to work the number of hours they are currently working. Our system is near the breaking point and I fear, vulnerable people and their families will be left in dire need.

House Bill 33, as passed by the House, is a good start towards supporting the critical services provided by REM Ohio. **We encourage this committee to support the House's version of H.B. 33 as it pertains to DODD appropriations. Further, we encourage the Senate to invest additional dollars into these vital services to raise direct support professional wages to at least an average of \$20.64 per hour. This investment will help us recruit and retain the workforce needed to continue to provide our quality services and return to the stability that people in our system need and deserve.**

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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