



Monday, April 8, 2019

Stakeholders Back Raises For Developmental Disabilities Support Staff

County boards of developmental disabilities, providers and self-advocates urged a House budget panel Monday to retain proposed rate increases for direct support professionals serving people with developmental disabilities.

The 11% increase is a central component of the budget proposed by the Department of Developmental Disabilities. (See **Gongwer Ohio Report, April 1, 2019**)

Jed Morison, superintendent of the Franklin County Board of DD, testified on behalf of the Ohio Association of County Boards of Developmental Disabilities. He urged the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services to maintain the appropriations and policies in the governor's proposed budget (**HB 166**) as it relates to developmental disabilities.

"This budget provides needed spending on a number of priority initiatives and includes policies that will protect public health and safety, ensure efficient and sustainable service delivery, and increase access to services in the community," he said.

The proposed rate increase for direct support providers will help county boards find and retain staff, he said.

"This rate increase is the first step to addressing high turnover rates in this demanding profession and curtailing a workforce crisis that threatens to upend our community service delivery model," he said.

Than Johnson, representing the Ohio Provider Resource Association, also praised and supported DODD's budget requests.

"The most pressing, critical issue today in our services is, the 'workforce crisis,'" he said. "We cannot stress firmly enough the chronic challenge of finding an adequate pool of eligible workforce DSPs. The solutions are varied but much depends on the ability to attract a workforce that is provided an appropriate wage and benefits and that allows us to compete with other health care entities."

The increase in the budget for direct service providers will help, but an even higher wage increase will likely be needed in the future to allow providers to continue to compete with other employers, he said.

Rep. Scott Lipps (R-Franklin) asked if there was a way to index the on-site on-call rate to minimum wage.

Mr. Johnson said the state has not historically attached a mechanism to raise the rate alongside the minimum wage. "It would be very positive" if that were included, he said.

Dan Sartin, a self-advocate from Hancock County, said a staff shortage at his local provider can hinder services.

"I hope to live on my own someday, but I worry that the shortage in direct care staff will limit my success in doing so," he said.

Mark Schlater, CEO of Toward Independence representing Bridge2Equality, said direct support professionals are the "lifeblood" of the system.

"Unlike any other business, we can't just place a sign at the drive-thru window or storefront indicating temporarily closed due to a staffing shortage," he said. "Providers across Ohio have to find a way to ensure services are provided to the individuals we serve. We must ensure their health and safety at all times."

Ben Young, a self-advocate with cerebral palsy, said the high turnover rates make it difficult to be an active part of the community.

"Because of the staffing shortage, not only do I deal with the revolving door of strangers, but I also can't go to the functions in my community as much as I would like to," he said.

"A lot of times, the community, the government and others look at people with developmental disabilities as one big unit," he added. "But each and every one of us is an individual. My needs, dreams, and aspirations are different than the next person."

Stephanie Maynard, speaking on behalf of the Ohio Self-Determination Association, said the state also needs to think about adequately training providers to take care of people.

"I just urge you to think about what we need to do to provide incentives for folks so that they stay in the system, but not only do they have incentives to stay in the system but that we properly educate people," she said.