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Developmental Disability Advocacy Groups Praise Historic Funding Increases for Direct Support Professionals in House Version of State Budget

COLUMBUS, OHIO—Following a yearlong budget advocacy campaign spearheaded by a coalition of organizations representing people with developmental disabilities (DD), their family members, private service providers, and county boards of DD, the Ohio House of Representatives voted 77-19 on Wednesday to effectively raise the average statewide hourly wage of direct support professionals (DSPs) in Ohio's DD system to \$17/hour on January 1, 2024 and \$18/hour on July 1, 2024.

After the floor vote, coalition members praised the House's investment as a significant step forward on the path toward establishing an average statewide wage of \$20/hour for DSPs while acknowledging that more work is still necessary in the Senate to reach their ultimate goal.

"The increase approved today by the House of Representatives represents an incredible commitment to people with developmental disabilities, their families, and the dedicated professionals who support them," said Pete Moore, president and CEO of the Ohio Provider Resource Association. "We couldn't be more thankful for all the legislators in the House who listened to the stories of the people we serve, recognized the urgency of the crisis they are facing, and took action to support them in this budget. We look forward to continuing this conversation with our champions in the Senate in the weeks ahead."

The House's version of the state's biennial operating budget (Am. Sub. HB 33) built upon the initial funding request submitted by Governor Mike DeWine earlier this year, which proposed increasing the state's Medicaid provider reimbursement rates between 10% and 16.5% beginning in 2024.

"We are grateful to Governor DeWine and his team for proposing such a historic increase in his executive budget, as this provided us with a strong foundation to build upon in the General Assembly," said Adam Herman, CEO of the Ohio Association of County Boards of DD. "Thanks to the House of Representatives, we are one giant step closer to our goal: offering competitive wages to those who work tirelessly in support of people with developmental disabilities and their families."

The Ohio Senate began holding its hearings on the state budget bill this week and will hear testimony in the Senate Medicaid Committee from developmental disability advocates on May 4.

Coalition members expect to continue their strong advocacy push for the duration of the Senate's budget deliberations.

"Throughout this budget process, legislators have told us how much they appreciate hearing directly from the individuals and families that are most impacted by Ohio's DD crisis because it helps them better understand the consequences of inaction," said Gary Tonks, president and CEO of The Arc of Ohio, Inc. "Our message to the Senate remains the same as it was in the House: people with developmental disabilities will continue to struggle to have their basic needs met until the state agrees to pay their support staff a competitive wage. That's all there is to it."

Funding approved in the House version of the budget supports increases to provider reimbursement rates for both Medicaid home and community-based services (HCBS) waiver residential, day, vocation, and employment services, as well as increases in reimbursement for services provided in Intermediate Care Facilities (ICF). This represents a slight shift from Gov. DeWine's as-introduced budget, which proposed different percentage increases for different types of services offered by DD providers.

"Ohio's DD system supports a wide spectrum of individuals whose services are tailored to their unique, individual needs in a variety of service settings," said Pete Van Runkle, Executive Director of the Ohio Health Care Association. "Direct support professionals deserve to be paid similar wages for similar work, no matter which setting they might be working in on any given day. We appreciate that the House of Representatives approved a balanced increase for all types of DD service providers with their version of the budget and pledge to maintain this balance in the Senate."

DD Budget Advocacy Coalition members continue to collect stories, testimony, and lived experiences from people with developmental disabilities, their family members, and direct support professionals (DSPs) working in Ohio's DD service delivery system. Those who would like to share their stories and get involved in the legislative process are encouraged to visit www.ohioddcrisis.com to learn more and join the cause.

Organizations participating in the DD Budget Advocacy Coalition include:

- The Arc of Ohio, Inc. – www.thearcofohio.org
- Ohio Association of County Boards of DD – www.oacbdd.org
- Ohio Health Care Association – www.ohca.org
- Ohio Provider Resource Association – www.opra.org
- Ohio Waiver Network – www.ohiowaivernetwork.com
- Values and Faith Alliance – www.valuesandfaithalliance.org

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