

Advocate. Educate. Connect.

January 26, 2015

John Martin, Director
Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities
30 E Broad St, 12th Floor
Columbus OH 43215

Dear Director Martin:

Our Ohio developmental disabilities system is in the midst of significant and transformational change. We appreciate your leadership in shaping a course to ensure that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities have the same opportunities in life as all Ohioans. One undeniable requirement of this transformation is an increasingly robust and healthy private provider base (waiver and ICF), anchored by sufficient and qualified direct support professionals (DSPs).

The new CMS rules on community integration, the downsizing of ICF's, aging caregivers, increased incidence of children being born on the autism spectrum, advances in neonatal medical technology and other factors will increase the demand for even more DSPs in the future. In fact, the US Department of Labor predicts direct service to be the number one job in demand over the next twenty years.

With wages below poverty and turnover up to 47%, providers are unable to fill vacant positions now. Providers hold DSP job fairs and very few qualified candidates show up. Rarely, is a provider fully staffed for long, if at all. Waiver and ICF/IID reimbursement rates have not appreciably changed and have lost considerable ground to inflation since 2005. Our workforce challenges have reached crisis levels. Many of our DSPs are eligible for and benefit from entitlement programs and many work more than one job to make ends meet. More often than not they are just one car repair or one illness away from crisis.

We have to aggressively address this now. OPRA applauds your Strategic Leadership Planning Group for its wisdom of benchmarking DSP wages to 200% of the federal poverty level over the next ten years. We agree with this recommendation. We believe that this budget is the time to begin.

OPRA proposes a 2016/2017 budget that includes sufficient funding to support a \$12.54 average wage for direct support professionals delivering H/PC in waiver settings and direct care in ICF settings. The only exception would be on site/on call, where the average wage would be at minimum wage. Beginning in SFY 2017, provider rates in waiver and ICF programs need to be adjusted annually based on an inflationary index. We are committed to system reform that leverages risk and efficiencies, thereby allowing providers to pay their DSP's more.

We appreciate your support for DSP's earning a better wage. We applaud all of your historic efforts in this regard. As always, we stand ready to support a department-initiated solution, or alternatively, intend to pursue this as an OPRA budget priority. We welcome further opportunities to discuss. Thank you again.

Sincerely,



Mark Davis
President