



**Residential Solutions for people with
Developmental Disabilities since 1972**

Senate Testimony

May 14, 2015

**Chairman Burke, Ranking Member Cafaro and
members of the Senate Medicaid Committee:**

My name is James Steele and I am the Executive Director of Ohio Valley Residential Services, a non-profit in Hamilton County, which provides residential solutions for people with disabilities. Over 140 of my employees work directly with people with developmental disabilities in an array of various settings. We operate in over 20 separate locations as well as several Foster Care settings, 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year. Our services are always “open”.

I thank all of you for the opportunity to be here today to share my story and more importantly to tell the general story of thousands of people who get up every day to go out into our communities with the sole purpose to assist people with developmental disabilities. These are my heroes. All of my heroes are in positions referred to as Direct Support Professionals or DSP's. My heroes often have to work two jobs just to provide for their families. They not only work under tight regulatory requirements but sometimes under very challenging circumstances where they can be harmed both verbally and physically. They are expected to arrive on time for their shift and provide caring, supportive, intimate supports every minute of every workday. These are taxpaying citizens who love their job, love the people they support and yet are faced daily with the choice of leaving our industry because they simply cannot afford the financial reality of staying.

Please allow me a quick personal story. I am so very lucky to be the big brother of Andy who was born with severe and profound disabilities. Andy never walked or talked. He never played little league, was in scouts or had the opportunity to serve his state through public service. Andy was totally dependent on others to care for him. My parents were told when he was born that he will not live past one year. We come from a very supportive family and we all lived together under the same roof until Andy turned 18 years old. His physical needs quickly became so difficult for my aging mother to handle and it was then that Andy moved into a group home where he flourished and impacted several thousands of lives. At the age of 30, Andy's body could no longer take the impact of his multiple disabilities. As we, his family, gathered around his hospital bed to witness Andy's final breath of life, I reflected on the four non-family members who were present, his four caregivers, his direct support professionals. They had come to the hospital that day, like many days before, to say goodbye to my brother. They had worked an entire shift prior to arriving, clocked out and spent hours of their own time comforting all of us so to honor the life of their friend. I tell you this story to make the point that there are many good, wonderful and caring direct support professionals out there just like these four, and we are losing

them and failing to attract many like these simply because we can't pay them a competitive wage.

30 years ago I too worked directly for people with developmental disabilities. I worked many wonderful years as a DSP. This experience was life changing and something that I'm proud and honored to have had, and something I will never forget. It made me realize that providing direct care is a meaningful profession and a valued career and we have an obligation to treat it as such.

I was pleased HB 64 as introduced included a 6% rate increase targeted for direct support professional wage increases in the developmental disabilities waiver system. This increase is so critical at this moment in time as providers across the state face critical workforce shortages. This was also the beginning of an acknowledgement of not just the realities on the ground but recognition of the value and importance of the direct care profession.

This 6% rate increase was part of a larger funding package historic in nature. The new monies for the developmental disabilities system encompassed a wide variety of immediate and long-term needs. As news of the new funding spread genuine excitement arose in our system. For the first time in a very long time the State was putting resource into our system to address needed deficiencies. Direct support staff saw an administration who began to value them and the contributions they make.

Excitement and anticipation led to worry as the House passed version revealed a reduction in funding. What happens if full funding is not restored? Which of the new initiatives is cut or reduced? Will it be the 6% wage increase? I am here today to ask you to ensure that Sub. HB 64 as passed by the Senate fully funds the Governor's developmental disabilities funding initiatives. This new funding addresses the core needs of our system and the timing is urgent. Thank you so very much.

Thank you for your time and this opportunity.

James W. Steele, MSW
Executive Director – Ohio Valley Residential Services