

June 25, 2009

The Honorable Ted Strickland
Governor
Statehouse
Columbus, OH 43215

The Honorable Vernon Sykes
Chairman, Conference Committee on H.B. 1
77 S. High St., District 44
Columbus, OH 43215

The Honorable John Carey
Vice Chairman, Conference Committee on H.B. 1
Ohio Senate
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Governor Strickland, Chairman Sykes and Vice Chairman Carey:

Before members of the Conference Committee come to a final determination on cost savings, efficiencies and cuts to services and supports for all Ohioans, the Ohio Disability Policy Coalition wishes to offer to the conferees the following information, which we believe hasn't been fully examined or debated by either chamber.

Ohioans with disabilities fare poorly in this budget. While we applaud the work that has been done to end waiting lists for services for elderly Ohioans, more than 27,000 Ohioans with disabilities currently sit on a waiting list for Home and Community Based Services waivers with no plan to address this need.

In 2006, the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) reported that Ohio ranked 42nd out of 50 states in funding community based rather than institutional services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. A recent Scripps Gerontology study reports that, in 2007, 40% of individuals with severe disabilities received assistance only from family or privately purchased care. Yet in that same year, Ohio spent \$3.4 billion (72%) on institutional long-term care and only \$1.4 billion (28%) on community based services. This budget perpetuates institutional services for people with disabilities and will not move us in the right direction.

There would appear no better time than now to rethink the way Ohio provides long-term services and supports to people with disabilities. The Disability Coalition is not alone in calling for an end to the unbalanced way money is divided up for long-term care. Editorials, front page headlines and letters to the editors in the Columbus Dispatch, Akron Beacon Journal and Toledo Blade all call for Ohio to stop the preferential treatment to the nursing home industry and other institutional-based settings.

The first action the conference committee can take to address this imbalance is to eliminate the nursing home and ICF/MR reimbursement rates from statute. Ohio is one of the few, if not the only, state in the country that sets rates in this way. This approach has done nothing but guarantee rate increases year over year. This is not appropriate public policy during a time when general revenue funds are regressing to 2001 and 2002 levels. The conferees must take the reimbursement formula out of statute and establish a price based system for nursing facilities.

Overall funding at Ohio's 10 state operated developmental centers is slated to increase by roughly \$27 million in this budget while the census is planned to decrease by 200 individuals over the biennium. The conference committee should closely examine the costs associated with the operation of Ohio's ten developmental centers. In 2001, the number of individuals served at state institutions for people with severe disabilities was 1,985 and funding for those services was \$213 million. By 2011 this budget proposes to serve only 1,250 individuals with a funding amount in excess of \$258 million.

This is particularly disturbing given that the recent cuts proposed by the administration last week will once again disproportionately impact community based services. The proposed cuts, if adopted by the conference committee, will reduce funding to the county boards of developmental disabilities (\$15 million dollars in FY 2010) and state funded home and community based waivers (\$10 million in FY 2010) while reducing developmental center funding by less than \$800,000 from the executive budget level.

While Ohioans wait for integrated services in the least restrictive setting of their choice, the state of Ohio appropriates more money for the most costly options available to serving people with developmental and other disabilities. The Disability Policy Coalition calls on the Strickland Administration and the General Assembly to reverse the way funds are spent on long-term care. We call for a system of services and supports where 75% of funds are spent on home and community based services and 25% are spent on institutional services for all people with disabilities by the year 2015.

The time is now to begin rebalancing Ohio's long-term care system. Ohio should be a leader and national model for how best to maintain integration in the community and to ensure a life of dignity and respect for people with disabilities.

Thank you for your consideration. The members of the Disability Policy Coalition are available to meet with you to discuss the importance of rebalancing Ohio's long-term care system.

Sincerely,

Members of the Disability Policy Coalition

Ability Center of Greater Toledo
Advocacy and Protective Services
Assistive Technology of Ohio
AXIS Center for Public Awareness of People with Disabilities
Cerebral Palsy Association of Ohio
Disability Network of Ohio – Solidarity
Easter Seals of Ohio
Linking Employment Abilities and Potential
National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Ohio Buckeye Chapter
Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council
Ohio Governor’s Council on People with Disabilities
Ohio Legal Rights Service
Ohio Rehabilitation Association
Paralyzed Veterans of America, Buckeye Chapter
Ohio Statewide Independent Living Council
The Arc of Ohio
Tri-County Independent Living Center

cc: : Senate President Bill Harris
Speaker of the House Armond Budish
Conferees of H.B. 1:
Representative Ron Amstutz
Representative Jay Goyal
Senator Dale Miller
Senator Mark Wagoner