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Ohio Olmstead Task Force Implores Ohio Agencies to Take More Immediate Action on In-Home Provider Crisis for Adults with Disabilities

Agencies must work together to make more short- and long-term improvements to home and community-based services across Ohio

Columbus, Ohio (August 12, 2021) -- The Ohio Olmstead Task Force (OOTF) implores the Ohio Departments of Medicaid, Developmental Disabilities, and Aging to work together to identify barriers and solutions to the in-home provider crisis and make those solutions a reality.

Ohio is currently in a state of emergency regarding people with disabilities' access to the in-home care provider workforce. The OOTF has identified **the in-home provider crisis as the largest barrier to independent living in Ohio**. Currently, in-home direct care workers, or "providers," make a median hourly wage of \$12.10 an hour, or \$16,200 each year – less than most retail workers, office clerks, restaurant workers, and even COSTCO employees. Renee Wood, vice-chair of the OOTF, and her husband Floris both have disabilities and are dealing firsthand with the fallout from this crisis in their Toledo home. They "went from five people working with us a month ago, to now only one.... but she too is tempted by an offer of another job that would pay her \$17 per hour. The maximum the County Board of Developmental Disabilities allows us to pay her is \$12/hour. She has a big loving heart, but working for us several hours a day, 5 days a week is her only source of income, so she has to consider her own welfare as well."

The staffing shortage, along with bureaucratic and administrative flaws in the systems, are creating dangerous – and in some cases, deadly – situations for many Ohioans with disabilities. For people that rely on personal care assistance to eat, drink, get in and out of bed, or engage in daily living tasks, a lack of direct care providers can literally cause people to starve, injure themselves trying to move around without support, and often must call 911 because they are left in an emergency health situation with no support.

These individuals have no need to be institutionalized and have every right to live independently – but because of the provider crisis, more and more individuals are left with no choice but to move into assisted living facilities. The dangers and lack of quality care in nursing homes and living facilities have been made even worse since COVID-19 has become a fatal bedfellow to thousands living and working in those institutions.

To assist the agencies in identifying ways to solve this crisis, OOTF created a Direct Care Crisis Work Group to identify outcomes and solutions to ensure that the opportunity to live in the community is available to all by building a more robust direct care system. The Work Group's recommendations are based on feedback and input from countless individuals, families, and direct care providers – the individuals that work most closely with and use these systems to live and/or make a living.

Recommendations include short term and long-term goals that will ultimately:

- Increase wages and reimbursement processes, as well as provide health care benefits for in-home providers;
- Streamline the certification process so providers can be eligible across waivers and agencies;
- Improve recruitment and incentives to entice new workers into the field; and
- Create easier systems for individuals looking for home and community-based services to find and employ eligible providers.

Dozens of individuals and organizations personally and professionally impacted by the provider crisis have also signed on to this letter with the hope that Ohio's agencies will finally overhaul home and community-based services in this state. **The OOTF is asking the directors to meet with them to discuss a plan for working cohesively to implement these changes. The OOTF is also planning this fall to organize regional public forums across Ohio so that state representatives can hear from Ohioans directly struggling with this crisis** and learn how they can assist in creating a stronger system of home and community-based services for thousands of individuals and families statewide.

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The Ohio Olmstead Taskforce is a statewide grassroots coalition of Ohioans with disabilities, family members, advocates, and organizations advocating for the right to live, work, and participate in their communities. Formed in 2002, OOTF supports and is guided by the principles formalized in *Olmstead v. L.C.*, the 1999 Supreme Court decision that held that unnecessary institutionalization is discrimination against people with disabilities.

You can read the full letter [here](#).