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Interested Party Testimony on House Bill 166  
House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services  
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Chair Romanchuk, Ranking Member West, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony as an interested party in consideration of House Bill 166 ("HB 166"). Disability Rights Ohio ("DRO") is designated by the Governor under federal law as the protection and advocacy system and client assistance program for people with disabilities in Ohio. A nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation, our mission is to advocate for the human, civil, and legal rights of people with disabilities in Ohio. Our thirteen member board is made up of a majority of people with disabilities from around the state who live, work, and play in a variety of settings.

HB 166, the state's biennial budget, provides additional financial resources to essential services for people with disabilities and mental illness in Ohio. DRO applauds Governor DeWine and his administration's proactive approach in addressing critical issues impacting Ohioans. This testimony will highlight five (5) budget proposals that when passed will provide additional supports to help people with disabilities and mental illness maintain their independence and live and work in their communities:

1. **Direct Service Provider ("DSP") wage increase** for the Department of Developmental Disabilities ("DODD") from \$11.12/hour to \$12.38/hour and from \$6.09/hour to \$8.55/hour for On-Site, On-Call. The increase in DSP wages is critically needed as there is a shortage of providers in the DODD system. These individuals provide essential care to people with disabilities, including laundry, personal care, assisting in transportation, and accessing activities in the community. Without these essential services many individuals would not be able to live in their own homes, and would be forced into much more expensive institutional care. This increase will help retain staff and ensure broader access to community-based services and supports.
2. **Access to home and community based waiver supports** from the Department of Medicaid ("ODM") through DODD are essential. The executive budget enhances the investment in the waiver program from \$58.7M in 2020 and \$139M in 2021. This continued investment will help support the three (3) DODD waiver programs administered by the County Boards of Developmental Disabilities: Self-Empowered Life Funding Waiver; Level One Waiver; and Individual Option Waiver, which currently serve

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40,000 individuals.<sup>1</sup> These enhancements will help provide for services like career planning, nursing services, and homemaker personal care services.

3. **Multi-System Youth** funding increases within the executive budget are critically needed to help support youth receiving services from multiple state agencies building upon recommendations made by the Recovery Ohio initial report. Many of the children served by DRO are multi-system youth who need better coordination and availability of services like peer support programs and wraparound services. Consideration should also be made to ensure families do not have to relinquish custody of their children just to receive needed services. This is deeply traumatic to both families and children receiving services. This budget wisely leverages funds from Medicaid, 4e, and DD services to build on and expand available services.
4. **Mental Health Services in Schools** funding increases proposed by the Governor are needed investments which will allow students to access mental health services and supports through coordination with behavioral health providers. These services promote the full continuum of care including peer mentoring programs and wraparound supports, to help stabilize youth, avoid unnecessary residential placement or hospitalization, and prevent youth from experiencing a crisis.
5. **Increased State Share for vocational rehabilitation funds** are necessary to drawdown the over \$131M in federal matching dollars. The state has continued not to drawdown the full federal match and even though this budget provides an increase it is minimal and still leaves funds on the table with the federal government. The unemployment rate for those participating in the market is double that to those without a disability.<sup>2</sup> Because of this it is essential that the Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities Agency drawdown their entire federal match. Moreover, the agency should work to fully expend these dollars, unlike in 2018 when, according to the Rehabilitation Services Administration, Ohio relinquished \$31,162,531 in federal dollars that were then reallocated to other states. These services are critical in allowing people with disabilities to enter the workforce and maintain employment ensuring individuals the ability to live and work in their community.

Again, DRO would like to applaud Governor DeWine and his administration in their efforts to enhance services for people with disabilities in Ohio through the state's biennial budget.

Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony as an interested party on HB 166 and I will be open to taking your questions.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Developmental Disabilities LBO Analysis of Executive Budget Proposal, 2019

<sup>2</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Persons With A Disability: Labor Force Characteristics – 2018*. This report indicated unemployment for individuals with a disability 16-64 had an unemployment rate of 8.7% compared to 3.8% for those without a disability.