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December 8, 2017

Honorable Steve Chabot
2371 Rayburn House Office Building
45 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: To Support House Resolution 4547 or the Strengthening Protections for Social Security Beneficiaries Act of 2017

Dear Representative Chabot,

Disability Rights Ohio appreciates your time and consideration regarding H.R. 4547, the Strengthening Protections for Social Security Beneficiaries Act of 2017 and urges you to support this essential bipartisan legislation, which was introduced by the Social Security Subcommittee Chairman Sam Johnson (R-TX) and Ranking Member John Larson (D-CT), providing protections for, and helping improve the lives of, individuals with disabilities in Ohio.

As you already know, this office has been designated by Governor Kasich as the federally authorized protection and advocacy system ("P&A"), with the mission to advocate for the human, civil, and legal rights of people with disabilities in Ohio. Through our work, DRO has helped individuals with disabilities and their families navigate the system and advocate to ensure they are receiving the necessary services and supports.

As the P&A, Disability Rights Ohio provides much need oversight of a system that has seen misuse. The program envisioned by this bill would build on work we did under a contract with Social Security a few years ago, and provide us with the ability to engage in more vigorous monitoring for abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Through news reports, Office of Inspector General and Government Accountability Office reports, and hearings held by the House Ways and Means Committee, Chairman Johnson and Ranking Member Larson found a demonstrated need for improvement in the representative payee review program.

H.R. 4547 recognizes the important oversight work of the P&A network and DRO and proposes to address concerns in the representative payee program in four (4) productive and beneficial ways:

1. Strengthening oversight of representative payees;

This bill requires additional performance reviews, types of reviews, and improves the overall effectiveness of these reviews by requiring P&A's (i.e. DRO) to conduct these reviews.

2. Reducing the burden on families;

H.R. 4547 eliminates the requirement to file annual accounting forms for representative payees who are parents or spouses living with their child who has a disability.

3. Enhancing protections for beneficiaries; and

This essential legislation improves information-sharing to help identify those who are in need of a representative payee, oversees performance, help improves coordination between agencies.

4. Improving the representative payee selection.

H.R. 4547 allows beneficiaries to make advanced designations of who they prefer to be their payee, allowing for a more person-centered approach to the program.

The Strengthening Protections for Social Security Beneficiaries Act of 2017 will help foster a stronger relationship between the P&A's like Disability Rights Ohio and the Social Security Administration ("SSA"); allow SSA to meet their responsibilities; and formulate the ability for P&A's to uncover and address safety issues and other matters important to beneficiaries.

This bill will also help Ohio's economy. As a small nonprofit business, Disability Rights Ohio employs around 50 staff, with competitive pay and full benefits. This grant would allow us to add approximately 7 employees, helping to the central Ohio economy.

Thank you for your time and consideration in our request for your support of the bipartisan bill H.R. 4547 which was brought forward by the Chairman and the Ranking Member of the Social Security Subcommittee. We look forward to working with you and your staff on this crucial legislation. If you have any questions, or wish to discuss the legislation further, please contact myself or Jordan Ballinger, Policy Analyst (ext. 135).

Respectfully,



Michael Kirkman
Executive Director