



## Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities

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Division of Disability Determination

**Testimony of Kevin L. Miller, Executive Director  
Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities  
Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services  
Thursday, March 5, 2015**

Chairman Sprague, Ranking Minority Member Sykes and distinguished committee members, my name is Kevin Miller and I am the Executive Director of Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) and I am pleased to present our 2016-2017 Biennial Budget for your consideration and ask for your support.

Four years ago our agency, formerly known as the Rehabilitation Services Commission, faced a great many challenges. We were out of compliance with federal regulations, faced dozens of questioned costs by our auditors, and had a waiting list of individuals seeking our services.

Today, thanks to the support of Governor Kasich and the General Assembly, a relentless agency wide focus on being good stewards of public funds, as well as implementing operational efficiencies and improved procedures, we have released over 17,000 individuals and eliminated all waiting lists for services. In short, we are in a much stronger position to fulfill our mission and serve Ohioans with disabilities.

### **WHO WE ARE**

Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities, is the state agency responsible for assisting individuals with disabilities to achieve quality employment and independence. We are also charged with making determinations on Social Security disability. This is accomplished through three major bureaus: Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR), Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired (BSVI), and Division of Disability Determination (DDD).

OOD's vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs are integrated competitive job training and workforce development programs that assist individuals with disabilities obtain and retain employment. In Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2014, more than 39,000 Ohioans with disabilities worked toward their employment goals and 4,580 individuals secured employment through these programs.

DDD, by agreement with the Social Security Administration (SSA), is responsible for determining the medical eligibility of Ohioans seeking Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). In FFY 2014, DDD determined eligibility for approximately 184,000 claims. One hundred percent of DDD's funding is provided by SSA, which sets the workload and staffing levels. SSA recently allowed OOD to hire 105 adjudicators who process claims, conduct case reviews and identify and report fraud, waste and abuse. Ohio continues to be the top performing state in its six-state region.

### **OOD'S MISSION AND FOCUS**

Our mission is to provide individuals who want to work with the skills and competencies they need to be competitively employed in Ohio's growing economy. According to the current census data, there are more than 1.5 million individuals with a disability in Ohio. The most recently published Vocational Rehabilitation Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment indicates that more than 225,000 of these Ohioans with

disabilities wish to enter the workforce and as I mentioned earlier, during the last FFY, OOD served 39,000 of those individuals.

To achieve this mission, for the last four years the agency has been focused on identifying and implementing efficiencies in order to improve individual outcomes based on data driven metrics. The results have been significant. Since FFY 2011 we have:

- Eliminated all waiting lists for vocational rehabilitation services by releasing over 17,000 individuals.
- Increased successful employment outcomes by 36% and new job plans written by 86% while reducing our cost per case by 15%.
- Realized significant process improvements and cost savings through formalized application of Lean Six Sigma tools and methodologies including:
  - Reducing the time from application to eligibility from 92 to 39 days.
- Developed a formal fee schedule and revamped our contracting processes to hold our staff, contractors, and providers accountable to their financial requirements and service delivery expectations.
- Began providing some services in-house, which reduces our service time and delivery costs, while maintaining the quality of services to individuals with disabilities.
- Upgraded outdated technology, which now allows for electronic signatures resulting in significantly less time to finalize necessary forms and paperwork during the vocational rehabilitation process.
- Implemented a focused business engagement model which has resulted in tripling the number of employer members of Ohio's Business Leadership Network, which was named the 2014 Affiliate of the Year by the United State Business Leadership Network.

Determined to renew our focus on building relationships and partnerships with the business community, we hired a Business Relations Manager to act as a single point of contact for businesses and regional Business Sourcing Analysts to work directly with businesses across Ohio to educate them on how individuals with disabilities can help meet their workforce needs. Within this engagement process we have developed a job matching tool that allows us to match job ready individuals with posted job openings. We have already achieved 100 job matches from this process alone, since we began in May of 2014.

The Executive Budget proposal positions OOD to build on this success and effectively serve even more Ohioans.

### **BUDGET DETAIL AND IMPLICATIONS**

I want to highlight for you a few of the programs included in the budget before you that build on this success and which we believe will have a positive impact on Ohioans with disabilities in the upcoming biennium.

**Employment First:** OOD shares Governor Kasich's commitment to increasing Ohioans' opportunities for employment and moving individuals with disabilities out of the shadows and into competitive integrated employment. The Employment First initiative is critical to continue this commitment and focus.

The executive proposal continues funding for the Employment First Partnership between OOD and the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD), which is designed to expand community employment services for people with developmental disabilities. OOD's dedicated Employment First Counselors work with local county boards of developmental disabilities to identify and help individuals move from segregated settings into integrated, community employment where they can earn a competitive wage and work alongside their typical peers.

Employment First is already delivering improved outcomes. Individuals served in the program gain employment nearly 18 months sooner on average, and costs are 40% less per employment outcome. We are excited to continue and advance this partnership in the upcoming biennium to serve even more of this population.

**Transition Services Partnership with the Ohio Department of Education (ODE):** The executive proposal includes \$2.5 million in each year of the biennium for a partnership with the Ohio Department of Education. These funds (included in the ODE budget to be transferred to OOD) will be matched with federal vocational rehabilitation funds at a ratio of \$3.69 federal funds for every \$1 of state funds. Modeled on the Employment First partnership, this project is designed to assist students in meeting the “fourth pathway to graduation” requirements by increasing the number of students with a recognized credential for entry into the workforce. It will involve embedding OOD counselors in targeted school districts (identified by ODE) and an ongoing collaboration with ODE on how best to assist students with disabilities in reaching their career goals on a year round basis. Vocational rehabilitation services provided to students will include: person centered planning, summer work experiences, job placement and retention services with family involvement. The partnership is anticipated to serve 3,300 high school students annually with approximately 1,650 of these students participating in work experiences each year and 450 students exiting school in competitive employment.

We are excited about the impact this partnership will have on Ohio students. Earlier engagement of youth with disabilities in vocational rehabilitation services (beginning at age 14) will ensure access to critical career planning and development activities necessary for sustainable, long term employment success. These activities facilitate greater participation in career technical programs and ensure that students exit school with marketable job skills; and, wherever possible, industry recognized credentials. Expanding the number of students with disabilities who exit secondary education with a diploma or recognized credentials increases the quality of employment outcomes. Improved employment outcomes means greater wages and hours worked, access to health insurance and other benefits, and increased job retention. All of this will strengthen Ohio’s economy and its communities. This partnership also directly aligns with the federal government’s focus on transition students as laid out in the recently enacted Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

**Vocational Rehabilitation Self Service Portal:** The executive proposal increases OOD’s state General Revenue Fund (GRF) match funding by \$500,000 each year in order to fund the development and sustainability of a vocational rehabilitation portal, including a web-based self-service application. OOD lacks a centralized and easily accessible means of effectively interacting with individuals with disabilities and our service providers.

The disparity noted earlier between Ohioans who want to work and those we are able to serve, involves a number of factors, but a lack of transportation, and thus access to our local offices, is predominant. At the same time, our VR service providers have specifically requested a simpler, more streamlined and efficient way to do business with OOD.

The proposed “VR-Portal” will improve all aspects of access to, and communications surrounding, our VR employment efforts. In addition to providing greater access to services and more effective communication, such an interface would position the agency to be ready for the statewide integrated case management systems currently being evaluated by the Office of Health Transformation and the Office of Workforce Transformation. Innovative service provision and improved efficiencies for both the individuals we serve and our service providers means a significant cost and time savings that would result in more people being served and in a timelier manner.

**Business Enterprise (BE) Program Capital Improvements:** The executive proposal includes increased appropriation for the BE program to fund capital improvements of food service operations run by vendors who are blind (this does not require additional GRF funds). These food service operations include outdated equipment and infrastructure, limited technology to support today's purchasing options, and the inability to support the changing trends of food service.

The result is that these food service operations lose market share and have less of an opportunity for business growth. This investment will allow these businesses to increase market share and expand.

We have already begun this modernization process and have built partnerships with companies like Starbucks and the Lottery Commission to provide customers more options and grow the customer base. These businesses primarily hire individuals with disabilities, so business expansion will lead to increased employment and income for those we serve.

### **CLOSING**

In closing, I am proud of the way our staff and partners have risen to the challenge and made a difference in peoples' lives, but there is more work to be done. This agency will continue to work smarter and leverage every state dollar available to improve the employment opportunities and outcomes for those we serve. The budget before you will enable us to continue our efforts and do even more. I respectfully ask for your support in adopting the proposed budget.

I am pleased to answer any questions that you may have.