Testimony Submitted to the Senate Finance Committee
On behalf of the Ohio Olmstead Task Force (OOTF)
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Presented by the Co-Chairs of the OOTF Legislative Committee
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Chairman Widener, Ranking Member Skindell, Members of the Senate Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Substitute HB 153 and its impact on the long term care needs of persons with disabilities, especially those under the age of 60. Specifically we are here to speak in favor of the amendment which will establish Home First components for the Ohio Home Care Program and proposed Unified Long-Term Services and Support Program.

We are here today representing the Ohio Olmstead Task Force (OOTF) a working group of more than 20 organizations and agencies that advocate with persons of all ages, all disabilities. OOTF believes that Ohio’s financial investment in Home and Community Based Supports and Services must be balanced, at minimum, with those spent on Institutional Services (which include nursing homes, developmental centers and ICF M/R). Currently, Ohio continues to pay for institutional services that people or their families wouldn’t choose if they had a viable alternative. And sometimes we pay for services that people don’t even need.

OOTF believes that Ohio has been successful in providing Home and Community Based Services for seniors, but we still have a long way to go for persons with disabilities under the age of 60. Ohio has provided more choice and alternatives to seniors and a May 2009 Scripps Gerontology Center reported that over a recent 10 year period that there has actually been a 9% decreased in Medicaid nursing home residents over the age of 60. That is because PASSPORT, and the other aging waivers and tools such as Home First actually work. However, this same study reported nursing homes are serving a higher proportion of persons under the age of 60, increasing to 11% in 2008, from 4% in 1994. This is an increase of 17%, with Medicaid paying for almost 15% of the under 60 nursing home residents.

OOTF believes that Ohio should extend the Home First law to people with disabilities under 60 so that people in danger of unnecessary institutionalization will be able to benefit from waiver services thus adding to the savings to be realized by the state. Money must follow the person and what would have been spent on institutionalization care should be utilized to provide home and community based services. So we thank you for including this amendment in the Substitute budget.
OOTF is a member of Advocates for Ohio’s Future, a statewide coalition which believes in the positive impact that public dollars have on health and human services, and OOOTF shares their concern that while the proposed FY2012-2013 biennial budget contains a lot of innovative ideas developed by the Office of Health Transformation many of which we have championed over the years, especially in the area of balancing long term care services and supports; that in reality this budget could have the unintended consequences of adversely affecting the progress we have made towards rebalancing and diminish the capacity of Ohio’s home and community based delivery system to support persons of all ages in the community of their own choosing. For example we did not understand the significant cuts to PASSPORT in the Governor’s budget and we applaud the House and now the Senate’s decision to restore some funding to the program.

Specifically, we are concerned that the financial framework that supports this budget’s rebalancing efforts as reflected in the following examples will result in unintended consequences for persons with disabilities.

- The proposed cuts to utilization (limits on the amount of service that can be delivered) to the PASSPORT and DD waivers
- Cuts to home and community based provider rates
- Cuts to the County Board subsidy which in many counties is used for the local Medicaid match for DD waivers
- Projected number of waiver slots for adults under 60. Currently there is a waiting list of 750 for this waiver, and the Governor’s budget proposes only 600 new slots for each year of the biennium.
- 27,000 persons with Developmental Disabilities are still waiting for home and community based services.

The Supreme Court Olmstead Decision requires that Ohio monitor the waiting list situation for home and community based waivers and has a plan that will result in the reduction of the number of people who cannot at a given time be served in the setting of their own choosing with the LTC services and supports that they need. The establishment of Home First components for the Ohio Home Care Waiver will help Ohio in this regard.

The Office of Health Transformation is also proposing in this budget that with CMS approval the state create one combined Aging and Disability waiver called the Unified Long-Term Services and Support Program. As Ohio plans for this waiver, we would ask that the General Assembly take a more proactive role in assuring that there is stakeholder input in the design of this service delivery system so that the needs of both the aging and disability populations are met. People with disabilities should not be forced into more costly institutional settings when their needs could be meet through home and community based supports and services. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.