



**Testimony by Thomas Cook, A.N.D. Executive Director
Given at the OMB Hearing on the
FY 2023 Department of Health and Social Services Budget
November 12th, 2021**

Good afternoon, everyone. I am Thomas Cook. I serve as the Executive Director of the Ability Network of Delaware, a statewide association that represents both DDDS and DSMAH community service providers.

Our association has three requests of Director Cade and Governor Carney as they work towards producing the Governor's Recommended Budget for FY 2023.

First, please fully fund I/DD services. This means allocating enough state funding to reach 100% of the recommended benchmarks for these services, which was identified in the rate rebasing study of 2018 data, which is now outdated because of the effect of the pandemic on the state's workforce. We are thankful for the investments made in FY 2022 to bring us up to 85% of the benchmarks. We need to go the rest of the way to deal with the workforce shortages that are currently being experienced by all I/DD providers, even with the increased funding that was appropriated.

Second, using all available funds, please make a substantial investment in the rates for Substance Use Disorder treatment. With Delaware having the second highest incidence of overdoses in the United States on a per capita basis, we must address this crisis, so we don't lose any more treatment providers or programs.

Third, please continue rebuilding the human services infrastructure in all areas – these are interrelated issues. If an I/DD provider is having a tough time hiring Direct Support Professionals, in some cases, it's because they can't find adequate childcare or eldercare, both of which are funded by DHSS. The Department's Rate Road Map should guide the development of future budgets for human services – we hope that the rates for mental health services will be reviewed in 2023, for potential adjustments in the FY 2024 state budget.

I have some additional comments, having just chaired a session yesterday at a national conference as the association's Long-Term Services and Supports Committee Chair. Things have changed radically across the country as a result of the pandemic realignment in the workforce, with retirements, inflationary wages, competition for workers, and other issues I've already mentioned impacting the availability of workers. Let's make the investments needed in human services to keep Delaware as a great place to live for all our citizens.

Thank you.