



Building Resources for Individuals with Disabilities to Gain Equality

## **MARK SCHLATER'S SPEECH**

**September 27, 2018**

Good morning,

I want to thank everyone for coming today. Each one of you has taken the time to come to the Statehouse to demonstrate your concern related to the staffing shortage in OHIO and ACROSS THE NATION.

I have worked in this field for more than 30 years and this is the first time that I have seen unified support across OHIO in the field of DD services; all in agreement on the need to raise awareness regarding the staffing crisis. That unity is clearly demonstrated today!

We have the support of family members, general community, county boards of developmental disabilities, Direct Support Professionals, (self-advocates) persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, college students, agency and independent providers, the Ohio Department of DD, various organizations supporting DD services and many, many more.

Many of you also represent people from your homes, from your community and from your organizations who could not make it here today. We are all in this together.

As I have stated, today is part of a nationwide day to raise awareness. For years, we have individually all talked about the problem "quietly voicing our concern to each other". Anytime people came together the number one issue discussed was the staffing crisis, we have all talked about it individually but collectively we have not come together to raise our unified concerns or develop a plan of action.

**WELL TODAY IS THAT DAY!**

More people need to be informed of this staffing crisis and state legislators need to hear us as well! We are here today to raise our voices and put an end to that silence.

As you will hear from our speakers today, this crisis affects every single one of us in some way. But the essence of this staffing crisis is the effect it has on the person with the developmental disability.

They have unique challenges because of their disabilities; however, their lives are made much more difficult due to the staffing shortages.

Their disability should not stop them from doing what they want to do. However, without proper staffing and support, there is a clear gap in achieving equality with people who do not have disabilities.

DSPs are the ones bridging that gap. The DSP is the LIFE BLOOD of this service delivery system.

I commend the State of Ohio for changing the service delivery system and enacting rules and regulations to protect individual's rights, and mandating integration into the community. But you see, without proper staffing levels, the service delivery system fails to operate properly.

Take a look at the Bridges logo on your fan or your t-shirt. You will notice it is in the shape of a heart. Everything you do is because you have a heart for the people we support. You are not here out of duty or obligation, each one of you has a passion to make a real difference in this world.

Each one of us is helping to bridge the gap in our own way, but that bridge is crumbling, the gap is growing, it's rusted, it's tired, it's worn out.

The key person filling that gap is the Direct Support Professional. This month we celebrated "DSP Appreciation", so today we want to applaud those who are filling this important role.

One of the biggest impacts we can make on the lives of individuals with disabilities is by providing consistency in care and services.

Imagine waking up to a new person helping you every single day. How would you feel having personal care being completed by someone you met 5 minutes ago and knowing that there could be a different person tomorrow?

People with disabilities have had a revolving door of staff for years. Sometimes for their whole life. That is the life that many of them have had to accept. This is no longer acceptable.

Today is just the first step in raising awareness of that problem. We must come together to create a unified voice to help all of Ohio and the nation understand the importance of this issue.

So what can YOU do starting today?

- Spread the word
- Give your support
- Talk about the problem
- Make your vote count
- Encourage others to get involved
- Talk to your legislatures regarding funding needs
- Volunteer your time

Let's put our voices together to end the silence.

The time is now.

Today is the day.

Together, we WILL bridge the gap.

Thank you