

Dear Chairperson Schmidt, Vice-Chairperson Miller, Ranking Member Denson, and members of the Family and Aging Committee,

My name is Lauren Bregar Hagenbuch, I'm a lifelong Ohioan, a Buckeye Alumni, a Speech Language Pathologist serving individuals who are profoundly impacted by their developmental disabilities, a wife, a mother, and a sister to a 31 year old brother with severe intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). My brother cannot speak verbally, but continues to develop his communication skills via a "communication device" that allows him to use technology to vocalize for him.

I am a proponent of Lauren's Law; but I am strongly advocating for *the inclusion of one additional item* that is critical to the safety, welfare, physical, **and** mental health of our fellow Ohioans with I/DD:

Investigations of alleged cases of abuse/neglect to be investigated by a third-party agency in place of the county board investigations.

Within Ohio's DD system, allegations of neglect, abuse, and human rights violations are referred to as *Major Unusual Incidents*, known also as "MUIs." As it stands, the county DD board employees are responsible for investigating themselves; and thus reprimanding coworkers, administrators, friends, etc, if necessary.

I reported over 70 MUIs, with substantiating evidence, during the period of October 2022 - January 2023. It took until July 11, 2023 for the Cuyahoga County Board of Developmental Disabilities to respond to my family and let us know that none of the allegations were substantiated. Yet, at the end of this letter I have attached the message log that I was able to download via the software on my brother's communication device. I have highlighted several of his statements and added notes to provide context for understanding. These are the messages my brother told me during his stay at the county owned Respite Home where he, and others, were residing in abhorrent conditions. As you read these heartbreaking messages that my brother expressed to me, I beg you to try to imagine if this was your own child or sibling begging to go home, or asking for necessities such as clothing (as his clothing was removed or "lost;" we never received his clothing and many other items such as phone chargers, blankets, etc).

My brother is fortunate that my family and I were able to bring him home. However, not every individual has family that are alive or are able to fulfill the herculean needs of caring for an adult with significant disabilities.

There are no words adequately to describe my emotions when I was informed that even my brother's own communications were ignored, as well as my significant substantiating evidence for the MUI allegations. When I brought my concerns to the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, I was told by the Assistant Director, Lyndsay Nash, that she was not interested in looking at my substantiating evidence. Instead, she provided guidance to myself and the Executive Director of the Autism Society of Akron to the effect of: 'take up your concerns with the General Assembly.'

In the spirit of Ms. Nash's advice, I implore you to include a change from "internal DD board investigations" to **external investigations by an unaffiliated third party**. Accurate and quality investigation outcomes are critical so poor conducted can be handled appropriately. To quote Governor DeWine, this aids in creating a family friendly state and helping **all** Ohioans to achieve their "God given potentials."

With the deepest appreciation of your time,
Lauren Bregar Hagenbuch

Sunday, December 18th, 2022

PAG +1 new
PAG +6 eat
PAG +1 open
PAG +1 new 1
PAG +2 shirt
PAG +7 hang out
PAG +3 go 2
PAG +3 all done
PAG +1 want
DEL +1 DISPLAY
PAG +1 play
PAG +1 water activities
DEL +2 DISPLAY
PAG +16 CHAT
PAG +1 I feel nervous
PAG +16 relax
PAG +2 something is different but I am safe
and okay
PAG +14 relax 3
PAG +2 I need space
PAG +0 yes
PAG +3 I
PAG +14 am
DEL +31 WORD
DEL +0 WORD
DEL +0 WORD
DEL +3 WORD
DEL +0 WORD
DEL +1 DISPLAY
PAG +10 happy
PAG +5 I
PAG +1 am
PAG +3 happy
PAG +15 to
DEL +0 WORD
PAG +0 too
PAG +5 I
PAG +1 love 4
PAG +1 you
PAG +14 CHAT
PAG +8 I feel nervous
PAG +3 relax
PAG +2 I want to be in my room
PAG +2 relax
PAG +6 I want to be in my room
PAG +6 go
PAG +2 all done 5
PAG +8 on

PAG +30 all done
PAG +7 go
PAG +0 all done
PAG +0 all done

Background

- This information is logged directly from the communication device that [REDACTED] uses as his "voice" as he is nonverbal.
- [REDACTED] had to be placed in an emergency respite home that is owned by Cuyahoga County Board of Developmental Disabilities (Cuyahoga DD); this is directly because there were not any DSP staff to help him stay in his own home.
- Cuyahoga DD owned Respite Home Staff removed his communication device from him many times.
- On my 12/18/22 visit I had to retrieve his communication device and give it to him.
- All of these statements are what [REDACTED] communicated to me when I visited him in the home, and gave him back his communication device.
- **Communication is a human right. It is indefensible to remove someone's ability to talk.**
- This document highlights just a few items to explain in detail what [REDACTED] had to say about his lack of ability to be in his own home, his own community, and with his own friends.

1	[REDACTED] was requesting new clothing. All of his clothing was taken from him. His closet was empty as was his chest of drawers. The Cuyahoga DD Respite home never found his clothing. I have no idea how long he was without clean clothing. The conditions were deplorable.
2	[REDACTED] was saying "go" and "all done" and gesturing while using body proximity to indicate he wanted to leave and come home with me.
3 5	[REDACTED] continued to express his stress and anxiety and requesting to leave the respite home, requesting to go to his home, and requesting to be all done with the respite home.
4	Expressing affection for me (family).