

TO: Rep. Brenda Landwehr, Chair and Committee Members
Robert G. Bethell Joint Committee on HCBS and KanCare Oversight
Kansas Legislature

FROM: Lori B. Feldkamp, President & CEO

DATE: June 10, 2024

RE: IDD Service Provider Capacity

For the past 51 years, Big Lakes has provided services and supports for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in Riley, Geary, Pottawatomie and Clay Counties in Kansas. Our mission is to deliver quality services that promote choice, independence and inclusion for persons with IDD.

In the 20 years I have led this organization, the biggest and most consistent barrier to services has been the recruitment and retention of qualified direct support staff.

Despite our best efforts, Big Lakes continues to operate with significant workforce shortages and high overtime costs. With the 25% rate increase approved by the legislature in 2022, we increased our starting pay from \$12.50 to **\$16 per hour**. ***We saw an immediate decrease in open positions and turnover.*** However, the decrease in open positions has not been sustainable. The trend over the past six months indicate we have reached the most that \$16 per hour will buy in the current workforce market. Our direct support vacancies have plateaued and appear to be climbing once again.

	Direct Support Staff Statistics				
	2020	2021	2022	2023	Jun-24
FTE Openings	40	48	31	24	32
Vacancy Rate	32%	43%	29%	23%	30%
Turnover Rate	28%	30%	18%	31%	23%

In 2016, Big Lakes made the painful decision to discontinue new admissions because of workforce shortages. With the progress made in staffing in 2022 and 2023, Big Lakes reopened admissions in 2023 and services began for 25 people in day/employment services and 17 in residential services. ***Big Lakes has once again shutdown new admissions as we are at our maximum capacity for staffing, transportation services and housing options.***

During the 2024 session, the legislature made a bold move to reduce the IDD waiting list which stands at 5,000+. Funding was approved for 500 individuals and a cap of 4,800 was also approved to stop the growth in the waiting list. This was great news for the many people waiting for funded services. However, this was not great news for the providers who provide those services. ***The IDD provider system is at a dangerous precipice as the movement to reduce the waiting list gains momentum with no increases in reimbursement rates.*** To serve more people, an expansion of services would be necessary for Big Lakes. In order to expand services, the 32 staff vacancies we currently have must be filled and additional staff must be hired to serve those coming off the waiting list.

In addition to more employees, other support services are necessary to serve more people. These include affordable/accessible transportation and housing. These support services are essential to access the services. Transportation in the four counties served by Big Lakes is subsidized by county mil levy and the counties already struggle with appropriating adequate funding for the cost of these programs because of high inflation. Housing in the Manhattan area is not affordable for those on social security nor is accessible housing readily available for those who require it. All of Big Lakes' affordable/accessible housing options are full and any expansion of housing requires long term planning and resource development.

An inadequate workforce, lack of affordable/accessible transportation and housing options will negatively impact the availability of services for those coming off the waiting list today.

Regular increases to IDD HCBS reimbursement rates must be planned and implemented including inflationary factors that drive those costs. Failure to do so will place IDD providers right back where we were in 2022 when we went nearly a decade without any increases at all. The IDD service system will not survive without periodic rate increases to ensure a stable system of supports for people with IDD. **A stable service system is absolutely necessary if there is any hope of reducing the waiting list.**

Thank you for the opportunity to share my concerns regarding the waiting list and IDD service capacity. We need to work together to develop a reasonable and predictable funding model we can all depend on to ensure quality services for people with IDD.