

Written Testimony of Mr. and Mrs. Elijah Williams

Ohio SB 27 Hearing Given at the Ohio House of Representatives

March 28, 2017

Thank you Ohio Senator Bill Beagle and his committee for sponsoring Ohio Senator Bill 27 on Ohio Deaf History Month. And thanks to all of you, House of Representatives State and Local Government Committee for giving us the opportunity to share with you our support on SB 27.

My name is Elijah Williams and my wife is Gina Williams and our three daughters are Felicia, Glanna and Elyssa. I was raised in a large Deaf Family on both sides of my parents'. Deafness is passed in our family generations. My wife's deafness is from an unknown cause.

Our family used to live in Cleveland, Ohio due to schooling for my girls but we were not happy with the lack of education resources for deaf children at one school in Cleveland. We decided to relocate to Columbus, Ohio where daughters attend Ohio School for the Deaf. They are learning more about their world through weekly visits to their school's library and through class activities.

A few years ago Dawn Watts, a friend of ours, agreed to help my daughters with books about Ohio's Deaf History. My girls were involved in a movie made by Dawn Watts posted on YOUTUBE for public awareness. With Dawn's help, our daughters learned a lot about Deaf History such as the First Deaf President at Gallaudet University on March 13, 1988. They never knew that we had to wait 124 years to have a Deaf College President. In addition, they learned that President Lincoln supported a proposal for a new college for the Deaf and he signed the charter

on April 8, 1864. My girls had no idea about the first school for the deaf in Connecticut founded by Dr. Thomas Gallaudet and Laurent Clerc, Gallaudet's deaf partner he borrowed from France. My girls were shown a book about William "Dummy" Hoy, a native of Ohio, who was the first deaf major league baseball player that invented the signs for "Strike", "Balls", "Out" and "Safe". Our daughters benefitted from Dawn Watts' help with the reading by using signing and facial expression to match statements in stories. As Deaf parents, we are thankful to have Dawn work with our daughters because they had no clue on contributions made by Deaf pioneers in several fields such as education, sports and technology. Our daughters show a genuine thirst for more knowledge about their Deaf World. However, Ohio's Public Libraries lack resource books by deaf and hearing authors for deaf children and for hearing college students wishing to seek a career in Deaf Education. My wife and daughters embrace Deaf Heritage and show a desire for the creation of Ohio Deaf History Month with this SB 27. This would help more families with the resources available for them and their deaf children. We would like to see Ohio's citizens learn about our Ohio Deaf Community through participation in public events. We would want our daughters to make future goals and succeed in their chosen career. We may never know if they choose to run for the Ohio House of Representatives in the future.

Thank you again for allowing us to give our testimony in support of Ohio Senate Bill 27 on Ohio Deaf History Month which runs from March 13 to April 15.