

November 1, 2017

Chairwoman Anielski, Vice Chair Hambley, Ranking Member Holmes, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony in consideration of Senate Bill 144 (SB 144). I am a member of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio. We are the consumer organization that believes in the full capacity of blind people and has the power, influence, diversity, and determination to help transform the dreams of blind people into reality. We believe in blind people because we are blind people ourselves. Our democratically elected leaders and our diverse nationwide membership are blind people, our families, and our friends. We are bound together by our belief that the blind are capable of achieving our dreams and living the lives we want and by the love and respect we have for one another and for all blind Americans. We support one another, act with courage and determination when we encounter barriers or experience setbacks, and engage in collective action to improve our lives.

The National Federation of the Blind is in full support of the establishment of a State Rehabilitation Council, in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. We believe that SB 144 will accomplish this task; however, we have strong concerns about its inclusiveness without amendments to address the following goals:

1. **Change the council name to reflect a body that is independent from Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD).** The current bill names the SRC the Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities Council. However, this council is intended to be a separate entity from OOD, operating as an independent advisor. Therefore, a name that would more appropriately reflect this position would be something like the "Ohio State Rehabilitation Council."
2. **Add an additional member to the council to appoint a blind person who has applied for or received BSVI services.**

As the bill currently reads under the list of council members, number 8 specifies an individual who has applied for or received vocational rehabilitation services." In the state of Ohio there are two separate agencies: BVR providing general rehabilitation services to most disabled Ohioans and BSVI providing unique services to blind and visually impaired consumers, because blind people require training in nonvisual skills for travel, daily living, reading, and computer technology. For this reason it is not sufficient to have council representation only from someone with BVR experience. Knowledge and experience of what constitutes effective adjustment-to-blindness training is essential on the council if blind Ohioans are to be represented. The federal stipulations for representation provide for a minimum of fifteen members. Adding a BSVI representative would raise this number only to sixteen.

The National Federation of the Blind of Ohio would like to thank the committee for its hard work on this vital legislation that would establish an SRC in Ohio and bring OOD into compliance with federal law. We hope that you will take our amendments under serious consideration.

Sincerely,

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