



**Testimony on H.B. 166: Main Operating Budget for FY 2020 - 2021**

**House Finance: Health and Human Services Subcommittee**

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Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member West and members of the Health and Human Services Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 166. The Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CABVI), the Cleveland Sight Center (CSC), and the Sight Center of Northwest Ohio (SCNO) are the three remaining sight centers in the state. Our private, non-profit agencies serve over 23,000 Ohioans each year from infants to seniors that are blind or have low vision.

Our mission is to empower individuals with visual impairments to achieve independence. Services provided by the Sight Centers include low vision screenings, orientation and mobility training, education and rehabilitative services, assistive technologies, counseling and recreation opportunities. Many of these services are not covered by insurance nor do they qualify for reimbursement through existing state programs. As a result, our organizations must undertake considerable fundraising efforts each year to meet the need in our communities.

This is currently the case for Early Intervention services offered by CABVI and CSC. Early Intervention services during the first three years of life are critical for the development of children with sensory impairments. Families with infants that have vision loss in Northeast and Southwest Ohio can access these services at no cost through CABVI and CSC. During home visits, specialists trained in infant and toddler development and blind/low vision techniques prepare parents and family members on ways to enhance the home environment and provide strategies to accommodate for the loss of vision unique to each child. This support is vital for parents during what is typically a distressing and emotional time.

Data indicates that best practice for Early Intervention services includes multiple visits per month. However, budget constraints prevent CABVI and CSC from offering more than one visit per month. Because of the lack of funding, SCNO is currently unable to offer these services. CABVI and CSC raise roughly a combined \$500,000 to support this programming each year.

We are here today to ask for your support of a budget request to fund Early Intervention services provided by Ohio's Sight Centers at \$1.5 million each fiscal year. According to census data, there are roughly 1,517 Ohio families in need of these services. Currently, 286 families are being served by CABVI and CSC. This funding would permit additional staff to be added by the Sight Centers, providing for expanded services across the state.

We ask for your support of funding for Early Intervention services at Ohio's Sight Centers. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this request. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.