



**Proponent Testimony on House Bill 587
House Health Committee**

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Stacey Butts, Executive Director, Sight Center of Northwest Ohio
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Good morning Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the House Health Committee. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to offer proponent testimony on House Bill 587, which would provide Medicaid coverage of white canes for individuals that are blind or have low vision.

We represent Ohio's three remaining Sight Centers. I am Larry Benders, President and CEO of the Cleveland Sight Center, Aaron Bley is Vice President of Community Relations & Chief Development Officer with the Cincinnati Association of the Blind and Visually Impaired, and Stacey Butts, Executive Director of the Sight Center of Northwest Ohio. We are incredibly grateful to Representatives Anielski and Kick for their introduction of HB 587, as it will contribute to our clients leading more independent lives.

The Cleveland Sight Center (CSC) was founded in 1906 and is the only organization in Northeast Ohio that is dedicated to fulfilling the needs of individuals who are blind or visually impaired. CSC provides comprehensive services for individuals from infants to seniors to overcome barriers they face in obtaining education, maintaining employment and achieving a high quality of life. We serve 17,000 people each year through direct services, preventative vision screenings and education programs.

The Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CABVI) was founded in 1911. CABVI provides counseling, vision rehabilitation, and employment services to more than 5,800 people annually. These services help individuals of all ages to adapt to severe vision loss in the Greater Cincinnati region. CABVI provides employment opportunities through our Industries Program and sells office products through www.VieAbility.org. CABVI also operates a Base Supply Center at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and provides Contract Management Services.

The Sight Center of Northwest Ohio was founded in 1923. The Sight Center of Northwest Ohio offers specialized vision rehabilitation services for those that are blind or have low vision to help them live independently. Their service area covers 16 counties in Northwest Ohio and part of Southeast Michigan. The main campus is located in Toledo, with a satellite location in Findley.

All three Sight Centers provide services to a wide range of age groups through a broad range of programs. These programs include educational services, mobility and orientation training, rehabilitation, independent living, and more. We are all supported by staff, boards of trustees, and volunteers, many of whom are blind or are visually impaired themselves.

Vision loss affects every part of an individual's life and can happen quickly or develop over time. Adding to the stress of this loss is the patchwork of insurance coverage that individuals facing vision loss must navigate. Most people we speak to are shocked at the lack of coverage for equipment and services used by these individuals.

Consider this, if you break your leg in a car accident, nearly all of the equipment and services you need will be covered, including physical therapy to regain strength in your leg. However, if you lose your vision in that same car accident, services covered during hospital care are likely covered, but rehabilitation services and equipment used to either regain partial vision or learn to navigate without your sight are not covered by private or public insurance.

House Bill 587 is an extremely important first step to acknowledging this gap in coverage for individuals that are blind or have low vision by providing coverage for white canes. At roughly \$50, coverage for white canes is a relatively inexpensive demonstration of legislative support for individuals that have long felt overlooked by the system.

You've heard us speak about independence a great deal today. That is because when our clients come to us for help, this is what they are ultimately seeking. The ability to navigate in what used to be familiar surroundings in their kitchen and family room. Freedom to take a walk safely in their neighborhood. Confidence to learn new skills and train for re-employment. Our staff works with individuals every day to accomplish these goals and we ask for your support through this bill and other initiatives to acknowledge their goal of independence and ease the path where possible.

Thank you again for giving us the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 587. We are happy to answer any questions that you may have.