



Testimony on H.B. 49: Main Operating Budget for FY 2018-2019

Senate Finance: Health and Medicaid Subcommittee

Larry Benders, President and Executive Director, Cleveland Sight Center

John Mitchell, CEO, Cincinnati Association for the Blind & Visually Impaired

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Chair Hackett, Vice Chair Tavares and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 49. The Cleveland Sight Center, Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired and The Sight Center of Northwest Ohio are the three remaining sight centers in the state. Our agencies offer low vision screenings, education and rehabilitative services, assistive technologies, counseling and recreation opportunities for individuals that are blind or have low vision. Our goal is to empower those who are blind or have low vision to achieve independence.

The Cleveland Sight Center has served the needs of Northeast Ohio residents that are blind or have low vision for over a century. We have a team of optometrists, therapists, employment specialists and other staff dedicated to assisting our clients to live their lives to the fullest. On-site, we operate a vision center, preschool, call center, assistive technology lab, and our Eyedea Shop. We also operate Highbrook Lodge, a summer camp outside of Cleveland, for individuals that are blind or have low vision.

The Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired has served residents in Southwest Ohio since 1911. CABVI's Rehabilitation staff works in the community teaching and training clients on ways to adapt their homes and workplaces to allow for optimal independence despite their vision loss. Their on-site Low Vision Clinic works with 1,500 clients per year helping them to make the best use of their remaining vision and continue to lead independent lives. Additionally, CABVI's Early Intervention Service for children works with over 350 families each year to ensure children with vision loss get the necessary early interaction and instruction to get a solid foundation to enable them to best lead their lives with vision loss.

Collectively, Ohio's sight centers served over 23,000 Ohioans from infants to seniors last year. Not included in this number are the thousands of family members also impacted by our services. People struggling with vision loss have spouses, children, and parents that are also learning how to assist and support their loved ones.

Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) is our partner in providing training and guidance to individuals we serve. We ask for your support of the OOD budget which includes a slight increase of non-General Revenue Funds. We also ask for your thoughtful consideration of our request for \$250,000 each fiscal year to be directed to Ohio's Sight Centers.

While we work very well with OOD, gaps in funding exists for many of the services that sight centers provide. For example, an individual that comes to our agencies because they are experiencing vision loss may require rehabilitation therapy to restore vision function. This allows these individuals to continue to live independently and maintain their accustomed quality of life.

Our low vision and vision rehabilitation therapists provide these services, at times absorbing the cost because they are not covered by Medicaid or private insurance.

It is surprising to many people we speak with that white canes are not considered “durable medical equipment” therefore, also not covered by insurance. Further, training for usage of the white cane used to be reimbursed up to 60 hours. Today, only 6 hours of training is covered.

In most cases, OOD’s hands are tied by strict federal guidelines for how funding is to be allocated. Even though they are supportive of the work that we do and have told us they would like to expand our partnership, they are unable to redirect current funding without risking federal match. Our budget request specifies that the additional \$250,000 per fiscal year is not subject to federal match to alleviate any of these potential challenges.

To put this in better perspective, think of what would happen if someone broke their leg in a car accident and also had an injury impacting their vision. While the medical needs for both injuries would be covered by most medical insurance plans, rehabilitation services would only cover the broken leg. An individual in need of rehabilitation therapy to restore visual capabilities would not have those services covered by insurance.

Additional resources are needed to connect services with individuals who need them. This funding would allow for us to increase marketing efforts to connect individuals that are blind or have low vision with services that allow them to live independently.

We ask for your support of additional funding for Ohio’s sight centers. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.