Ohio House Health Committee

Proponent Testimony HB 188

Prohibit blindness from denying or limiting care of minor

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Submitted by: Eric Duffy

4183 Indianola Avenue

Columbus Ohio 43214

Chair Lipps, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Boyd, and Members of the

Ohio House Health Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 188. I have been blind since birth, and I also have mild cerebral palsy. Neither of these things kept me from raising two boys as a single parent. Both of my sons are grown now and I am very proud of them. My oldest son John joined the Marine Corps shortly after high school graduation. Lucas is a manager for a delivery company in the Columbus area.

 As I was growing up my parents had very low expectations for my future. One day I overheard my mother say, they’re even letting them have kids now. I knew the “them” she was referring to was blind people. Before my boys were born I heard of cases where blind people were being denied the right to adopt. I also heard about cases of babies being taken away from blind parents at birth.

 With this in mind, my heart stopped for a second every time I was contacted by a children’s services worker. I thought about what is going to happen to my kids if this person doesn’t understand about blindness. I knew from other cases that the county could take them and that I would have to fight and work to get them back. This would not be good for them or me.

 I had Children’s Services called three times as my boys were growing up. Each time the agency took no action after visiting my home. But the people who called them clearly did it to create problems for me because they were upset for one reason or another. They knew the way to get to me was to try to go through my kids.

 The county should have clear and convincing evidence that a parent or parents are not providing proper care. They should not be able to remove a child because of a lack of understanding of blindness.

 There is no magic formula that says if it happens this many times in Ohio then we need a law to protect blind parents. The fact is that if blindness is used against a parent once, it is one too many times. I have worked with parents where blindness has been used against them. Let’s make this kind of discrimination stop in Ohio.