



**State School**  
for the **Blind**



## **Testimony on the Ohio School State for the Blind Budget Provisions of House Bill 166, the FY20-21 Biennial Budget**

Ohio Senate

Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education

Lou Terher, Chair

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Chair Terhar, Vice-Chair Lehner, Ranking-member Fedor, and members of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding the Ohio State School for the Blind's budget provision sections of House Bill 166, the Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Biennial Budget. My name is Lou Maynus, and I am Interim superintendent at the Ohio State School for the Blind.

As the first public school for the blind in the United States, our school has been educating students since 1837. We offer comprehensive educational opportunities to approximately 130 visually impaired and blind students. Our students come from all across Ohio and represent 38 school districts in 35 counties. In addition, we serve more than 150 infants and toddlers ages 0-3 through our early intervention program. Our mission is to work with students, families, and the community to provide an effective, educational experience through specialized curriculum and specific instruction to develop our student's potential. Our work expands to blind and vision impaired youth throughout the state providing resources, evaluations, and recommendations for best practices in their home school

districts. We service nearly 180 local education agencies through our statewide services program.

Governor DeWine's budget recommends General Revenue Fund appropriation for the Ohio State School for the Blind of \$12.4 million in FY20 and \$12.6 million in FY21. These numbers represent a growth of 18.4 percent in FY20 over FY19 and another 1.1 percent increase in FY21 over FY20. Increases in GRF appropriations are necessary to maintain service levels as well as to support key priorities of our school's strategic plan tightly aligned to the Ohio's strategic plan.

The appropriations will serve our blind and visually impaired **(1)** early childhood program.

This investment toward training and supplies include pre-braille supplies, pre-Orientation and Mobility skills, and play-based learning tools and will reduce future cost of education, medical care and additional social spending. Our recent holiday event featured eight blind and visually impaired little kiddos who played the bells with support from six adult volunteers. Another blind student played the piano like Liberace. The students and families were so proud. Our students show much grit in learning to navigate life's challenges that sighted children take for granted such as walking from the classroom to the cafeteria on their own. Although our school provides supports for safe access, our children with visually impairments have many hurdles. Emotional immaturity can be a barrier that students often face without proper counseling or role models. Our blind or visually impaired students have less knowledge about social rules without visual cues. Something as simple as knowing when to speak can be a challenge in a group setting without visual cues. I recently witnessed an early elementary student's proud moment of successfully making her own bed. It is times like this that make our whole child environment more relevant.

Investment in our **(2)** mental health services and residential program serves to meet the needs of the whole child.

In alignment with Governor DeWine's culture of innovation, the Ohio State School for the Blind must focus strongly on the **(3)** integration of technology for our students. Our blind students can have the room audio described for them with a click of a key stroke thanks to assistive technology. They can find a recipe for their favorite dessert and it be read to them as they plan and prepare the food. Teachers and students can access specialized curriculum online or in their learning management systems library. We know our students must master more than the core curriculum to succeed in the workplace and technology will help make that happen.

A strong focus on **(4)** career ready transition services help students plan and succeed beyond high school. Employment rates for visually impaired or blind students are currently around 25%. This is unacceptable. Onsite job placement options that are individualized for students is an investment. Through these extended programs we are providing an immediate return with evidence of less social spending.

**(5)** Blind students use instructional materials/textbooks and all supplemental materials in Braille. An expanded core curriculum that includes assistive technology, orientation and mobility, and sensory efficiency skill building are important for blind learners. Supports are necessary for advancement in our student's academic achievement especially given challenges such as learning 189 Braille contractions for the Unified English Braille code in comparison to the 26 letters of the alphabet. Our school's plan is to become a national model for academic and expanded core access for blind and visually impaired students. A

collaborative dream is to secure a model greenhouse for other blind schools to visit as part of our horticulture program.

**(6)** Increasing the safety and security of our students is a key priority. This can be realized through assigning an officer from the Ohio State Highway Patrol to monitor both the Ohio State School for the Blind and the Ohio School for the Deaf.

As a residential school facility for the state, our funding is not driven by enrollment and per-pupil allocations like traditional school districts. Rather, we are funded like other state agencies. Our capacity is tied directly to our GRF allocations. We are serving more families and students with complex needs and we do not gain additional dollars as we enroll multiply involved students.

Educating blind and visually impaired students is highly specialized. Half of our population has multiple disabilities and require specialized services and extensive resources to meet their additional needs. We offer unique opportunities for our students such as working to advance STEM skills using raised graphics and 3D printers. Lessons involving tactile graphics help our students understand content. Our passionate teachers are instrumental in working to restore a nationally recognized collection of historical models, providing students a tactile way to explore over 40 models such as the United States Capitol or the Taj Mahal. Students complete research on the historical structures so that everyone can have access to not only see the structure but learn about the significance. This information is available in Braille and large print. Our next goal is audio description for each model. The models are on display for all students to see which they would never be able to experience without such unique access. You each have a small replica of a model and I would like to formally invite

each of you to visit our school to meet our expert staff, students, and to see our model collection.

The recommended increases included in the governor's budget will allow the school to improve our services to Ohio's blind and visually impaired students and as the first public school for the blind in the nation, we aspire to become **the** model blind school for student success.

Your continued support is sincerely appreciated.

Thank you for your time. I am available to answer any questions you may have.