



Testimony on the Ohio School for the Deaf Budget Provisions of House Bill 166, the FY20-21 Biennial Budget

Ohio Senate
Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education

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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 School for the Deaf's budget provision sections of House Bill 166, the Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Biennial Budget. My name is Lou Maynus, and I am superintendent at the Ohio School for the Deaf.

Our school has been in operation since 1829, serving deaf and hard of hearing students, as well as those with additional disabilities. Currently, we have more than 170 students served on our campus located on Morse Road, north of downtown Columbus. Our students travel from all across Ohio, representing 90 school districts in 45 counties this school year. Our mission is to provide specialized education and statewide services in partnership with families, communities and professionals so that all deaf and hard of hearing children in Ohio have access to a comprehensive education program. As part of our statewide services, we provide specialized information, resources, and comprehensive student evaluations to inform individualized

education programs for school districts and families across the state. These programs benefit over 200 local education agencies per year.

Our ultimate goal is to prepare our students to learn, thrive and become productive citizens.

Governor DeWine's budget recommends General Revenue Fund appropriation for the Ohio School for the Deaf of \$13.1 million in FY20 and \$13.6 million in FY21. These numbers represent a growth of 16.5 percent in FY20 over FY19 and another 3.9 percent increase in FY21 over FY20. 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 GRF appropriations will serve our deaf and hard of hearing **(1)** early childhood program. Research shows that children with disabilities who receive early developmental opportunities are more likely to become healthy and productive adults. Our deaf children often enter school with limited to no communication skills. Some of our students enter kindergarten without the ability to ask for a drink or to even go to the restroom. I have had to explain to my deaf kindergartner that the dream she had last night was a story in her mind while she slept and didn't really happen because her mother didn't have the sign skill to explain. Or, my facial expression with my forehead wrinkled is because I have a headache and no, I am not mad, my student has not done anything wrong.

Lack of effective communication skills is extremely frustrating and can cause students to react inappropriately to stressful situations. Some students experience difficulty without the needed self-regulation. Parents of teenagers know the ups and downs of emotions that our typical hearing middle schoolers and high schoolers go through. Imagine going through those years with language delays that cause miscommunications between students almost daily– the drama of those years is multiplied and requires much intervention. Investment in our (2)

mental health services and residential program serves to meet the needs of the whole child.

This whole child approach is at the core of the Ohio Strategic Plan.

In alignment with Governor DeWine's culture of innovation, the Ohio School for the Deaf is poised to embark upon a multi-year plan for the (3) integration of technology for our students. Access to technology provides our students with not only rich learning experiences in class but gives the students a level of independence they may never have experienced. Enhanced technology will allow our deaf kindergartners to have an electronic story read and signed to them over and over even though there may not be a person who can sign readily available. We know our students must master more than the core curriculum to succeed in the workplace. It is especially challenging with less than full access for our students to develop research skills, critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaboration. Success is possible for our students with the effective application of these vital skills in a technology-infused learning environment.

Preparing our students for a successful life beyond high school is our top priority. Research shows that a strong focus on (4) career ready transition services helps students prepare to succeed beyond high school. With current rates of employment in the deaf community at 40%, it is vital that we prepare students as they enter college and the work force. Onsite job placement options individualized for each student is an investment in students sustaining employment. Through these extended programs we are providing an immediate return all while showing evidence of less social spending.

(5) Comprehension of reading and writing is critical to our deaf students learning, both in and outside the classroom. Math manipulatives and updated science materials provide developmentally appropriate tactile and visual hands-on experiences. Well-designed updated

research-based curriculum and instructional supports are necessary for advancement in our student's academic achievement. Our goal is to become a premier academic school for the deaf.

(6) Our school provides support services through our Interactive Video Distance Learning program through which we teach American Sign Language course levels 1, 2, and 3 to over 150 deaf, hard of hearing and hearing students attending public schools. Updates related to our ASL curriculum will advance our online services to students across the state.

(7) Increasing the safety and security of our students is a key priority. Given the climate across our nation of crimes against schools, assigning an officer to share services with the Ohio State School for the Blind is both ethically and fiscally responsible.

As a residential school facility, we are serving more families and students with additional complex needs, commonly referred to as deaf plus students. We do not gain additional dollars as we enroll multiply involved students and these requests continue to increase.

Deafness affects the development of speech, language acquisition and academic skills. If our children do not receive intensive, instruction from highly qualified teachers of the deaf or access to specialists knowledgeable about hearing loss in the elementary years, the achievement gaps are devastating.

The recommended increases included in the governor's budget will allow the school to improve our services to Ohio's deaf and hard of hearing students. I would like to formally invite each of you to visit our campus for a tour of our facilities and to see student learning in action!

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