



Interested Party Testimony on House Bill 110

House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services

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Chair Roemer, Ranking Member West, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 110. The Cincinnati Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (CABVI), the Cleveland Sight Center (CSC), and the Sight Center of Northwest Ohio (SCNO) are the three remaining sight centers in the state. Our private, non-profit agencies serve over 23,000 Ohioans each year from infants to seniors that are blind or have low vision.

Our collective mission is to empower individuals with visual impairments to achieve independence. Services provided by the Sight Centers include low vision screenings, orientation and mobility training, education and rehabilitative services, assistive technologies, counseling and recreation opportunities. Most of these services are not covered by insurance nor do they qualify for reimbursement through existing state programs. As a result, our organizations must undertake considerable fundraising efforts each year to meet the need in our communities.

This was the case for Early Intervention Special Instruction services offered by CABVI and CSC prior to the last operating budget, which included \$750,000 each fiscal year for these services for children (0-3) who are blind or have low vision. This critical funding allowed the Sight Centers' staff to provide Special Instruction to new parents and caregivers in **24** counties across Ohio. This funding was also critical for The Sight Center of Northwest Ohio to begin offering these services to children and families. **We ask for your continued support for this funding in House Bill 110.**

Early Intervention Special Instruction services during the first three years of life are critical for the development of children with sensory impairments. Families with infants that have vision loss in Northeast, Southwest and now Northwest Ohio can access these services at no cost through CABVI, CSC, and SCNWO. During home visits, specialists trained in infant and toddler development and blind/low vision techniques prepare parents and family members on ways to enhance the home environment and provide strategies to accommodate for the loss of vision unique to each child. This support is vital for parents during what is typically a distressing and emotional time.

Special Instruction and Early Intervention Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) defines early intervention services, including special instruction, that are offered to support families, infants and toddlers that have developmental delays and disabilities.

Special Instruction is a specific discipline within Early Intervention that brings a trained specialist to homes to coach parents and family members on ways to enhance the home environment. Special Instruction focuses on promoting caregiver-child interactions and instructional strategies to promote child learning by adapting typical activities. We provide an individualized plan as well as model strategies that can help children who are blind or have low vision to develop the compensatory skills that they will need in home and school.

Special Instruction is traditionally a 'high touch' activity where trained staff, caregivers and the child are all in close social proximity. When the pandemic struck in March 2020 intense physical contact was not possible. The Sight Centers quickly adapted to create alternate ways to deliver services to these families for which the support is essential. Staff creatively used front porches, backyards, cell phones, Zoom, Facebook and other technologies or interventions to help the child and parent.

This shift in delivery of services has been successful. During the crisis, Early Intervention special instruction services actually increased to 2 to 3 touches per month to support the needs of the families. **Since the availability of this funding in July 2019, our agencies provided 2,724 hours of instruction to 328 unique families in 24 counties in Northeast, Northwest, and Southwest Ohio.**

We ask for your support of continued funding in the budget for Early Intervention Special Instruction services provided by Ohio's Sight Centers at **\$750,000 each fiscal year**. This funding will allow continuation and growth of services across the state. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this request.