

To: Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee

From: Ali Benmerzouga (member of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio)

Subject: S.B. 202 Testimony

Date: Monday, October 25, 2021

Dear Chair Manning, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas, and Members of the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee:

After Greetings,

I would like to thank you for giving me the chance to submit my proponent testimony in support of S.B. 202. My name is Ali Benmerzouga and I am a member of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio and the recording Secretary of the Cleveland Chapter. As an organization, we believe that blind people are competent, capable, independent, contributing citizens and very reliable in all walks of life. For example, our membership is composed of lawyers, doctors, scientists, social workers, instructors, teachers, writers, business owners, therapists, and I believe the list can go on and on.

The National Federation of the Blind fully supports not considering disability an elimination criterion to caring for minors. We believe that S.B. 202 will solve once for all the existing low expectations and misconceptions about the capabilities and how reliable are disabled parents.

Since I joined the National Federation of the Blind in 2014, I have heard many real sad and great stories from my friends. Among the sad stories I have heard from my friends are how newborns have been removed from their disabled parents' care, how disabled parents have been denied custody of children in divorce cases, and how disabled parents and prospective disabled parents have been denied equal consideration in foster care and adoption. Among the great stories I have heard directly from my friends from Cleveland, Cincinnati, Columbus, Dayton, Oberlin and Springfield is that they have successfully raised their kids and made them strong, healthy, successful and great contributing citizens.

Having said that, I am looking forward to seeing that the legislature should include procedural safeguards that require adherence to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and respect for the due process and equal protection rights of disabled parents. I believe that you have the power to add Ohio to the great list of states that have already passed this kind of preventative

legislation.

On behalf of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio, I would like to take this opportunity and thank the committee for its hard work on this extremely important legislation that would protect the rights of disabled parents throughout the state of Ohio.

Sincerely,

Ali Benmerzouga

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