

February 28, 2023

Dear Chairperson Caruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services,

Thank you for the opportunity to offer proponent testimony on House Bill 33, the state's main operating budget. My name is Timothy Skaggs, I am the director of the Community Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (CCD) at the Cleveland Hearing & Speech Center, and I am thrilled to support the proposed budget for Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities Agency. More specifically, I believe this budget will have a profound impact on deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals as a result of the strategic investment in the "Services for the Deaf" line item (GRF 415508).

My support for this strategic investment comes from our Cleveland-based CCD, as well as the other Community Centers for the Deaf across the state, including

- Deaf Service Center, in Columbus and Toledo
- Catalyst Life Services in Mansfield
- Greenleaf Family Center in Akron
- Triad Deaf Services in Canton
- Easter Seals of Mahoning, Trumbull, and Columbiana Counties in Youngstown
- Family Services Center in Dayton
- Hearing Speech + Deaf Center in Cincinnati

With my colleagues we are proud members of Ohio's deaf community and we proudly serve others in the deaf community as professionals. We are directors, managers, case managers, advocates, coordinators, and outreach specialists and vocational rehabilitation providers. Together, we are writing to express our support for the increase in funding to the Services for the Deaf line item (GRF 415508) in the Opportunity for Ohioans with Disabilities Agency's budget in House Bill 33. We urge you to consider the important role that these services play in the lives of those with hearing loss, and the positive impact that increased funding could have on our community.

As people who have experienced the challenges and barriers imposed on deaf individuals, we know firsthand the importance of having access to quality services and resources. Whether it's access to interpreting services, case management, or training on independent living skills, these services are essential to our ability to communicate effectively, engage with the world around us, and live full and productive lives.

Community Centers for the Deaf do a lot for the Deaf Community. I will be explaining the service we provide, and why it is important for us to maintain and expand these services with the increase of funding of the Services for the Deaf line item.

1. Information and Referral Services- This concept is to help Deaf people to reach out for information they might need in American Sign Language. If everything is in English and the

Deaf client doesn't know a lot of English, it can lead to missing a bill payment, missing a court appointment, misunderstanding a doctor's order, and many more. You can imagine how frustrating it must be to receive things, and not understand anything.

2. Individual and System Advocacy Support: The Deaf Community has a hard time advocating for themselves because they were never taught how to do this. Many of you went to school to learn this set of skills of how the system works, how the voting process works, how to ask for things, how to create a resume, and many more. If deaf people did not get that support from school and parents did not know ASL, how would the Deaf person learn the basic life skills? Our center does a lot of advocacy to make sure they achieve their best quality of life.
3. Independent living skills training- If the school or parent could not provide ASL to help them achieve, that leads to many Deaf people to not know basic life skills. Deaf people do not know basic life skills such as how to pay the bills on time, how to cook a proper meal, understand the internet, and how to work with hearing corporations when they find a job. We come in and support them, with the goal to gain independence and do things alone.
4. 24/7 Sign Language Interpreting- All of our centers provide American Sign Language (ASL) to facilitate messages between the hearing and the Deaf. When a Hearing company hires a person who is Deaf, they tend not to know ASL. When the deaf client needs to go to a Doctor's visit, they don't know ASL. When we need a presenter to speak about Deaf Culture, they don't know ASL. They might have done something they did not realize was wrong, and they need to go to court. They don't know ASL. It has impacted our everyday life because not many agencies provide ASL to the Deaf community. Our Interpreters are vital to our everyday role because they support Deaf people to be able to communicate effectively with the task they need to become successful.
5. Jobs: Many of our Deaf community do not work due to the language barriers, and understanding of how jobs work. Community Centers for the Deaf provide a lot of training to the Deaf Community to support them to understand how the job world works. We help them with their resumes, we help them with understanding what the job description is asking, and we help them understand the requirement to achieve their goals, and support them by teaching them how to work with hearing bosses, peers, and customers. We also provide training to these job sites that might not be knowledgeable about the Deaf community by providing ASL classes, Understanding of Deaf Culture, and On the Job support.

Over 90 percent of Deaf children are born to Hearing parents. Of those parents, most never learn ASL. This has coined the term called Language Deprivation. Language deprivation is the result of a lack of access to the language. In the Deaf culture, our language would be ASL. If we are not able to access basic stuff in our everyday lives, it really hinders the ability of anyone to grow. Flowers can't grow without sunshine or rain. Think of those two as communication/ basic access, without those two what happens to the flower, is also what happens to the Deaf child. This can lead to a feeling of isolation, identity loss, exclusion, and a lack of cultural identity. Our Deaf Community has been greatly impacted by this and many of our Deaf Clients have the reading ability of 2-3 grade. Navigating the world with a second-grade reading level is extremely tough, and on top of that, most community resources do not have American Sign Language access for deaf people to know what

is going on. This is why our CCD center is so important to these Deaf communities. We help them to achieve the information they need to grow.

It is not only the Deaf Community that is struggling but it is also our Community Centers for the Deaf that provide these services. It is frustrating for the deaf professionals who work at the CCDs. While I can't speak for the all deaf professionals on their personal frustration, I will personally explain my experience to help you understand why it is critical to support this funding.

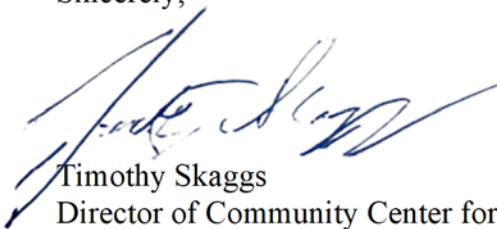
I am the director of the Cleveland Community Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Cleveland, leading a team of 5 deaf professionals. I am part of a team of 8 directors—all of the other directors are hearing professionals. It has been hard to do my job as effectively as any hearing director is able to function. I require a lot of support to make things happen. I would like to share one of my MANY stories that hinder my ability to be effective as a leader in the Deaf Community, and I know other CCDs can resonate with my story. Imagine you have a big meeting coming up to advocate for a big company to hire a deaf worker, and you did everything in your power to make sure the meeting will be running effectively. You ask for an interpreter, but the company decides to say no. I explain that it is an accommodation need, and they need to provide it. However, I feel bad if I miss this important meeting. I show up to the meeting with all these hearing companies excited to pitch the idea of partnership. However, there is no interpreter. It makes me feel inadequate as a professional that I could not able to express myself to the company to achieve what I wanted to present. This would likely lead to a reschedule, and sometimes companies don't even bother a reschedule. This is an experience that none of you have to ever go through. This is an extra step, that none of you have to experience. And the Deaf Community, including myself, has missed a lot of meetings because of our needs are not being met. This doesn't just include only my meeting with the partnership. This includes many meetings such as Doctors, Laws, Police, Companies, and many more.

Increasing the funding will give the Deaf a greater chance to achieve more independence in their life. Increasing the funding will help to get more interpreters to their appointment. Increasing the funding will provide more support to gain more access to understanding how the world works. Increasing the funding will help us to look for more jobs. Increasing the funding will help us to educate hearing corporations on how to work with Deaf people. The increase in funding will help the Deaf quality of life to grow. With this support, let the flower in the Deaf Community grow.

We urge you to consider this issue carefully as you make decisions about the upcoming budget, and to support the increased funding for services for the deaf. Your support will have a profound impact on our community, and will help to ensure that we can all participate fully in the rich and diverse culture of Ohio.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Timothy Skaggs  
Director of Community Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing  
Cleveland Hearing and Speech Center