

March 7, 2023

I would like to start by saying thank you to the House Finance Committee of the Disabilities for having me speak on a topic that is near and dear to my heart. That is raising awareness and advocating for the DeafBlind to receive the much needed help in getting Support Service Providers or otherwise known as SSPs.

I'd like all of you to image being DeafBlind. Would you be able to drive to this seminar? Would you be able to be in attendance? How about being able to see/hear what's being said by the speaker/signer? I think it's safe to assume you all answered "NO" to all these questions. This is the stark reality of being DeafBlind. Furthermore, this is just the tip of the iceberg of the problems they face.

My name is Dawn Watts, I've been a professional deaf interpreter for 35 years also been a support service provider for the DeafBlind for 50 years, With all my experience, I can say I've seen it all. When I was in Washington, DC, I saw how DC partnered with adjoined states of Maryland and Virginia to provide SSP services to the DeafBlind. What stands out there is that there are only 30 other states that offer these SSP services. However, on the other hand, in Ohio, I've seen the frustration of trying to get statewide legislation passed only to be disappointed. Of the 88 counties in Ohio, Franklin county is the only county that offers SSP services however it is limited only to Senior Citizens including DeafBlind who over 60 years old. Even for Franklin county's 60 years old and over demographic, the services are financially limited to the point, they have to pay out of pocket for SSP services. For example, Seven years ago, DeafBlind, 65, had to pay 900.00 for 20 hours a month! What about those Ohioans that are ages 18 to 59. They are the forgotten one's.

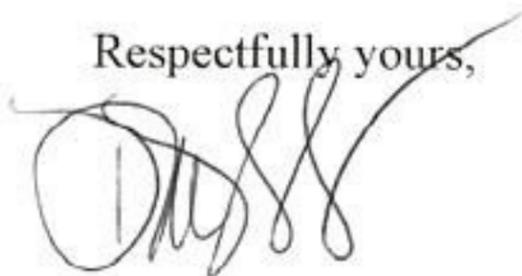
Why is it so important to have SSPs provided for the DeafBlind? A support service provider is a specially trained individual who serves as the eyes and ears of the person who is DeafBlind. Also, they provide access to the community. This empowers the DeafBlind person to make decisions for themselves based on the visual, environmental and social information provided by the SSP. To further clarify, the SSP provides access to the community by making transportation available as well as acting as a guide when escorting persons to and from a meeting, church, grocery store, and so much more. As stated above, the SSP provides visual and environmental information to the DeafBlind by describing who is in the room, the activity, the mood, reading a menu, shopping for food, and

providing assistance with the ever-changing computer technology such as getting access to teleconferencing for health and social reasons. (Notes)

In closing, among the greatest difficulties DeafBlind people face are those related to communication and mobility. Communication barriers in particular can lead to a profound sense of isolation, loneliness, depression and helplessness that leads to suicide. This is why it is so important to provide full SSP's services statewide in Ohio for the DeafBlind.

Thanks for your time.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'DKWatts', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Dawn K Watts