

Dear Senator Huffman,

My name is Donna L. Schultz. I reside at 6483 Berry Pond, Canal Winchester, Ohio 43110. I am the president of the Ohio Association of the DeafBlind (OADB), a 503©3 nonprofit that represents DeafBlind Ohioans and those who identify as having severe vision and hearing loss. I am writing to you to offer my written testimony regarding the SSP amendment included in HB33. It is listed as HC1993X3.

First of all, I identify as DeafBlind (DB). I am deaf and have Optic Nerve Atrophy, and Glaucoma. I am experiencing significant double vision issues. I am retired from the US Department of Defense where I spent 33 years. Being that I, along with many other DB Ohioans, are calling for our state legislators to help us launch and fund the Support Service Provider (SSP) program. Ohio currently does not offer such a program at the state level. Only one county in Ohio offers such a service (Franklin Senior Options). Currently this program exists in 30 areas in the US but not in Ohio. The program empowers DB Ohioans to be more independent and affords them the opportunity to be part of their local community as well as being more engaged in their family, so forth.

What is an SSP program? What does it do for DB Ohioans? What are the statistics? Let me share the following:

Support Service Providers (SSP's) are trained individuals who enable people who are DeafBlind to access their environments and make informed decisions by providing them with visual and environmental information, human guide services, and communication facilitation.

The Importance of SSPs

SSPs provide assistance with daily activities such as grocery shopping and errands; navigating throughout the community, communicating, and accomplishing tasks in environments such as stores, laundromats, and doctors' offices; labeling foods, medications, and clothing; making telephone calls; and participating in family, community, recreational, and social events and activities.

DeafBlind People in Ohio

- Approximately **85,000 individuals** surveyed in Ohio said yes to two questions: (1) Are you deaf or have serious difficulty hearing? (2) Are you blind or have serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses? (2021 US Census Bureau's American Community Survey)
- Currently, only a few places provide services for DeafBlind Ohioans and the ones that do exist are limited. For example, the program in Franklin County serves only adults age 60 and older.
- The SSP model has been established for the past 40 years and is currently being used in over 30 SSP programs across the country. There is **no comprehensive statewide program providing DeafBlind people the direct services to meet daily needs.**
- **A possible solution is that OOD adds a line item to their budget to include SSP services**

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. Please let me know if there is anything I can add or do, to help you further understand our need for an SSP program here in Ohio.