

Testimony for HB 96 DeafBlind Fund

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Hello. My name is Lisa Skowronski and I am a long time resident of Ohio. I currently live in the Cincinnati area in Clifton area. I am writing to ask for your support for an amendment to HB 96—the DeafBlind Fund. The fund has support from Republicans and Democrats.

For the past year and a half, the DeafBlind Fund has been used for a Support Service Provider (SSP), or CoNavigator (CN), Pilot Program. The fund was first added in the 2024-2025 Ohio Biennial Budget with support from Republicans and Democrats and signed by Governor DeWine. The DeafBlind Fund was under Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. The fund was administered by the Columbus Speech & Hearing Center (CSH).

I am writing this letter to show my support of HB96-DeafBlind Fund. It is a very valuable and meaningful program for the persons in the deaf/blind community. These services allow deaf/blind individuals to take part in their community and function independently doing necessary everyday tasks. DeafBlind Ohioans need stable funding for services so that they can be as independent as possible in their activities of daily living both in their homes and community.

I have been working as an SSP for eight months through the DeafBlind Fund. It has been a rewarding and learning experience. I am an Occupational Therapist by trade, so I know the importance of independence in completing daily living tasks both in the home and community. I have worked with a wide variety of clients from preschool to adulthood to ensure that they are functioning at their fullest potential and independence during my career. I have so enjoyed assisting DK, who is a blind woman who wears bilateral hearing aids in the Cincinnati area. She is an amazing woman-mother of three grown children, grandmother, writer, technology wizard, college graduate and self-employed. She insists on being as independent as she is able but there are some tasks that require vision and hearing. She is intelligent and does not need things explained to her but merely read or described to her so that she can make an informed decision/choice. She is her best advocate and always lets me know what she needs to be independent. Sometimes it is as easy as showing her one time how to do something and then she is independent from then on and other times she will need braille labeling or tactile bumps placed on items/appliances so that she can complete her daily tasks such as cooking and laundry on her own. Some of the tasks that I help her with on a weekly basis are:

- reading through her mail

- taking her to doctor/audiological/therapy appointments
- mobility around her apartment complex
- clothes/shoes/grocery/household items shopping
- setting up new appliances, labeling food and other items such as dials on stove or other appliances with braille labels/tags or raised bumps
- visits to bank for financial business, online services such as depositing checks to account
- online forms especially those requiring scanning a QR code
- visits to post office to return items purchased online and other mailing tasks
- identifying safety concerns such as spills or dropped items in path, broken items
- locating dropped or missing items in her apartment
- assist with organizing and placement of items in house, desk space

I am very concerned for DK and other DeafBlind Ohioans and their future if the funding for these services is stopped. Everyone deserves to be independent, make their own choices and decisions in their lives. We need permanent funding for services like this to ensure this basic quality of life.

I would greatly appreciate your support of HB 96 DeafBlind Fund and your support in finding a permanent solution for services to our underserved DeafBlind Ohioans.

Sincerely,

Lisa Skowronski