

April 1, 2025

To the Honorable Finance Committee,

My name is Katrina Schmidt, and I am writing to urge you to reinstate the DeafBlind Fund and secure funding under GRF 415515 for Ohio's Support Service Provider (SSP) program. I was born and raised in Ohio, and my mother, who is DeafBlind, lives in Ohio. I have seen first hand how life-changing SSP services are for both her and other DeafBlind Ohians.

Before my mother had access to an SSP, daily life was not just challenging—it was dangerous. She has been hit by cars multiple times, fallen down flights of stairs, and narrowly avoided other serious accidents simply because she lacked access to the support that so many take for granted. When the SSP Pilot Program was introduced, her life changed dramatically. With the assistance of an SSP, she has been able to safely navigate errands, attend medical appointments, and remain actively engaged in her community. Not only helping her, but her family as well giving us the peace of mind that she has access to the important services she and other DeafBlind Ohioans need.

An SSP is more than just a guide—they are a lifeline. They help with essential everyday tasks, from reading menus and price tags to ensuring safe passage through public spaces. Without SSP services, many DeafBlind individuals are left isolated and at risk, unable to fully participate in society. It is unacceptable that Ohioans should be left behind while more than 30 other states have already established permanent SSP programs.

The success of the pilot program proved that the need is real and that this program works. Now, we must take the next step and make it permanent. I urge you to restore and increase funding for the DeafBlind Fund so that Ohio can continue to provide this essential service.

Please don't let Ohio fall behind. Invest in the safety, dignity, and independence of our DeafBlind community.

Sincerely,

Katrina Schmidt

Instructor, Loyola University New Orleans