

Hello, Honorable House of Representatives. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

My name is Jason Judy and I am DeafBlind from Akron. I am able to be here because my co-navigator drove me and helped me navigate through the statehouse.

I have Ushers Syndrome type 1, which means I was born deaf, but my vision declined around age 18. There were many things I loved when I had vision – like watching Star Wars and playing sports.

Losing my vision rapidly was an uncharted territory for me and I couldn't find help, nor knew where to look for it.

There were so many barriers like accessing transportation and work. It hampered my ability to live independently and autonomously.

My hearing family tried to help, and God knew they desperately wanted to, but they had busy lives. For a few years, I had no support and little contact with the world outside my home.

I finally had help to look for services when my mother retired. But many of the organizations for the blind we went to didn't have funding for a sign language interpreter and didn't know of any resources. One even admitted they were uncomfortable working with DeafBlind individuals like me.

Finally, we found Cleveland Sight Center to provide braille lessons, but the wait was long and I was very lucky to have my mother be able to drive me each week.

You can't imagine how wonderful it felt to be able to take the braille lessons when I was going through a hard time. It gave me a new hope for a better life.

The Support Service Provider/Co-Navigator program fills this very needed gap of services for DeafBlind Ohioans.

While my experience felt unique, it is not. There are 84,797 Ohioans who have dual vision and hearing loss. The SSP program will spare them the years of isolation and frustration I went through. SSP services are essential and fill a huge gap in Ohio's resources. I urge you to support the DeafBlind funding.