

Hello! Thank you for allowing me to speak about a cause that's near and dear to my heart.

My name is Brad Race. I am proud to say I'm a Support Service Provider (SSP) and Co-Navigator for the Deaf Blind. A Support Service Provider is a trained professional who works with Deaf Blind individuals by providing environmental and visual information, mobility guidance, transportation and communication support. SSP's are trained and skilled in the communication mode and the needs of each deafblind individual. There is a wide variety of communication modes among the deafblind-these include spoken English, close vision sign language, tactile signing and something called Pro Tactile sign language. You may see some of these communication modes here today.

Using these specific communication modes, SSPs provide information empowering the Deaf Blind to make informed decision. SSP's do not make decisions for the Deaf Blind but rather it's a "with and not for" service model which facilitates independence and access for the Deaf Blind.

In Ohio alone, there are more than 80 thousand Deafblind individuals. The Deaf Blind are the most isolated and underserved population. Without continued State funding, SSP services will end on June 30th, 2025.

Without continued funding, the Deaf Blind will no longer have access to SSP's to accomplish everyday tasks and activities that you and I take for granted. Without SSP's, the Deaf Blind:

- Won't be able to ascertain environmental/social surroundings,
- Won't be able to identify and interact with people
- Won't be able to do basic tasks such as clothing and grocery shopping, reading mail, paying bills, banking, scheduling Dr visits, and much more.
- Won't be able to make informed, autonomous choices
- Won't be able to attend religious and social activities
- Won't be able to complete forms for services
- Won't be able to know danger and safety issues

What I stated above isn't the worst of it. The Deaf Blind will continue to struggle to communicate and navigate the world without their 2 key senses. The impact of losing access to SSP's will have a drastic psychological impact.

Art is a Deaf Blind client who has shared about life without SSP services. Art's family friend was a POW in the Vietnam war. His friend said that being a POW wasn't the worst of it. At one point, the friend was placed in solitary confinement. He said COMPLETE ISOLATION led to a rapid decline in his mental and physical health. Unfortunately, Art knows the feeling of isolation and confinement-not being able to interact and communicate with others and not being able to get out and do things for himself. Without SSP services, Art will be completely isolated and confined. Art isn't alone in feeling this way. Many Deaf Blind share this feeling of complete isolation and confinement.

In closing, The Deaf Blind need you! I implore all the Ohio Legislators to not leave the Deaf Blind isolated. **YOU CAN NOT ALLOW THIS TO HAPPEN!!** Please support and continue funding for the Deaf Blind Support Service Program. Say YES and PASS House Bill 96.