

To the Honorable Finance Committee,

There are over 30 established SSP programs in the United States, and it is time we have one in Ohio. I was overjoyed when a member of the Finance Committee suggested enlisting ours as a pilot program. For the last two years, our new SSP Pilot Program has been successfully serving people who are DeafBlind. However, when I found out that the budget did not allocate any funds for the next biennial year, I literally sat down and cried. I am tired of the DeafBlind being left behind. I plead with you to help us bring this vital program back and make it an established, permanent SSP program.

While I am losing my eyesight and have significant hearing loss, I pride myself on being very independent and active in the community. Over the years, I have fallen down a flight of stairs—not once, but twice—been hit by a car three times, and had several other close calls. I have fallen into a deep hole, almost stepped into an elevator shaft, and experienced many other dangerous incidents. Despite my many bruises and broken bones, I consider myself lucky to be alive today.

When the SSP Pilot Program started two years ago through the Columbus Speech and Hearing Center, I was ecstatic to be matched with an SSP (Support Service Provider, or Co-Navigators as they are sometimes called). My whole life changed for the better with the help of my SSP. I feel safer, am physically and mentally healthier, and can still be involved in the community.

My SSP, who serves as my “eyes and ears,” helps me run errands, go shopping, visit my doctors, vote, attend weddings, funerals, and important meetings, fill out forms, and complete many other tasks that would be impossible, or difficult at best, without her help. I can continue dabbling in the arts with my SSP describing the colors of my pottery pieces and assisting me in setting up tables at fairs. When we approach stairs, she places my hands on the railing so I can safely descend. At curbs, she stops, signaling to me that there is a step up or down. Among many other tasks, she reads menus at restaurants, identifies prices at stores, and repeats what I cannot hear in noisy environments. She even lets me know if I have spilled something on my

shirt! After I clean, she checks for any missed spots. I could go on and on, but I believe you understand how important our SSPs/Co-Navigators are to navigating daily life and doing everyday tasks that most take for granted.

I come from a large family and am a mother and grandmother. I take pride in having earned two college degrees and several certifications and have worked hard my entire adult life in the accounting field for both corporations and small businesses in Ohio. I love to dabble in the arts and volunteer in many different capacities, including serving on Boards of Trustees, Consumer Advisory Committees, and mentoring teenagers. I have voted and paid taxes for years.

Please help us reinstate our SSP program, restore the DeafBlind Fund, and increase the budget allocation. There are quite a few people on the waiting list as they needed to be served as well. Help us make this a permanent program so that Ohio can join other states with established SSP programs. We don't want Ohioans to be left behind!

Thank you for your time and for listening to my story.

Sincerely,

Lynn Jansen