

Maria Matzik
Breaking Silences Advocacy Committee
Interested Party Testimony, HB 96
Senate Finance Committee
June 6, 2025

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written-only testimony. My name is Maria Matzik, and I am the host of the Breaking Silences Advocacy Committee. I submit this testimony as both an advocate for disability rights and a proud member of the disability community. I speak today not just for myself, but in solidarity with the thousands of Ohioans with disabilities whose voices are too often silenced, whose experiences are ignored, and whose rights are treated as negotiable in policy discussions.

As currently written, Sub House Bill 96 poses serious threats to the basic rights, independence, and economic security of people with disabilities across our state. I urge the Committee to consider the following key areas of concern.

Group VIII Medicaid Trigger Language:

Sub HB 96 retains harmful trigger language that would terminate Medicaid coverage for over 700,000 Ohioans if the federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP) dips below 90%. While the House version included a phased transition plan, this is not a sufficient safeguard. The fact remains: access to healthcare should never be subject to arbitrary thresholds or future budget fluctuations.

This policy would disproportionately harm people with disabilities, especially those with complex care needs who rely on continuous coverage to survive. Home care workers, both skilled nurses and direct support professionals, are the lifelines that keep us in our communities. They allow us to work, go to school, raise families, and participate in civic life. But they are drastically underpaid, often uninsured, and many rely on Medicaid themselves. Eliminating Group VIII coverage, especially in this moment of workforce collapse, is shortsighted and inhumane. A coverage loss of this magnitude would not only destabilize lives but increase institutionalization, worsen health outcomes, and deepen health inequities.

Ohio must not gamble with people's lives. I urge the Senate to eliminate this trigger language entirely and affirm its commitment to protecting Medicaid access for all who need it.

DeafBlind Fund Elimination:

Sub HB 96 removed the DeafBlind Fund from the Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities agency budget, a move that endangers the autonomy and community integration of DeafBlind Ohioans. This modest \$100,000 line-item funds Support Service Providers (SSPs), also known as Co-Navigators, who are essential to enabling DeafBlind individuals to complete daily tasks, access information, and engage with their communities.

Without this funding, many DeafBlind individuals will be isolated from community engagement. The removal of this funding, whether intentional or accidental, sends a clear message: that the basic rights of some of Ohio's residents are expendable.

The Senate must act immediately to restore this funding and ensure that DeafBlind Ohioans have access to the services they need to live independently.

Removal of \$20,000 Unearned Income Disregard for Medicaid Buy-In:

Sub HB 96 also removes a critical House provision that would have allowed people with disabilities on the Medicaid Buy-In for Workers with Disabilities (MBIWD) program to exclude up to \$20,000 in unearned income when determining eligibility. This change would have helped people remain employed while preserving access to vital Medicaid services.

The removal of this provision effectively reinforces the "benefits cliff" that keeps many Ohioans with disabilities locked in poverty. Unearned income, such as small pensions, child support, or Social Security survivor benefits should not disqualify someone from working or accessing healthcare.

Reinstating this disregard is essential to fostering employment equity and enabling Ohioans with disabilities to participate fully in society without sacrificing their healthcare or independence.

In summary, Sub HB 96 must be revised to reflect the principles of inclusion and access. As it stands, it undermines the progress our state has made in recognizing and supporting the rights of people with disabilities. I urge the Senate Finance Committee to:

- Eliminate the FMAP trigger language,
- Fully restore the DeafBlind Fund,
- Reinststate the \$20,000 unearned income disregard for MBIWD participants.

Ohio's policies must reflect the rights of ALL Ohioans and supports independence and affirm our equal place in society.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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