



Testimony of Amy Pulles

President and CEO – Prevent Blindness Ohio

HB 96 – State Operating Budget

Senate Health Committee

May 13, 2025

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding House Bill 96, the State Operating Budget. My name is Amy Pulles, and I am the President and CEO of Prevent Blindness Ohio. My comments today will focus specifically on provisions related to the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) and Ohio Department of Aging (ODA).

Prevent Blindness Ohio (PBO) is Ohio's leading volunteer nonprofit public health organization dedicated to our mission of preventing blindness and preserving sight. We serve all 88 Ohio counties, providing direct services to one million Ohioans annually and educating millions about what they can do to protect and preserve their precious gift of sight. The programming emphasis of PBO includes eye health education, advocacy, and early disease identification for Ohioans at high-risk of losing their sight, including preschool and school age children.

PBO has partnered with ODH and other state agencies on several initiatives over the past few decades to fulfill our shared goal of vision health and preservation. PBO is one of four nonprofit organizations that receive support from the Children's Save Our Sight Fund, which is administered by ODH. The Children's Save Our Sight Program is funded by voluntary contributions made by Ohioans when they register or renew a motor vehicle. We also partner with ODA to facilitate the Ohio Aging Eye Public-Private Partnership. PBO is very proud of our partnership with the State of Ohio and are committed to doing all that we can to save the sight of all Ohioans.

We have two budget requests for the committee to consider. The first is we are asking the Senate to retain a House-added provision related to the Save Our Sight Fund; this can be found in the comparison document as DOHCD38. The Save Our Sight Fund was

established in 1998 and has existed unchanged since then. As noted previously, Ohioans have the opportunity to make a voluntary contribution when registering or renewing a motor vehicle registration. ODH provides four equal grants annually to support the work of PBO and other grantees. In addition to our vision screener training, funds support the Ohio Amblyope Registry, K-12 education programming offered by the Ohio Optometric Association, and protective sports eyewear offered by the Ohio Ophthalmological Society. The Save Our Sight Fund is 100% utilized for service delivery with no costs being passed on to end users. Children are the sole beneficiaries of these investments.

The Ohio House of Representatives added an amendment that expands the Save Our Sight Fund checkoff to licenses issued by six healthcare-related and education-related boards: State Medical Board, Ohio Board of Nursing, Ohio Board of Pharmacy, State Vision Professionals Board, State Board of Emergency Medical, Fire, and Transportation, and State Board of Education. We feel that licensees of these boards will be very supportive of making a voluntary contribution to Children's Save Our Sight. This language is currently in HB 96, so our ask is simply to retain it.

PBO is also seeking a small appropriation of \$100,000 (\$50,000 in SFY 2026 and \$50,000 in SFY 2027) from ODA's Senior Community Services line item to support our HealthyEyes Advocate and Adult Vision Screening Training program. This program provides free vision screening training and equipment, eye health and safety information resources, and access to vision referral and treatment resources to healthcare professionals, volunteers and other social service organizations to perform vision screenings on adults and provide vital eye health and safety education.

As you know, many Ohioans suffer from age-related vision issues. While half of all blindness is preventable, the number of Ohioans who suffer vision loss continues to increase. Evidence shows that up to 50% of vision problems that can lead to vision loss can be prevented with early detection and treatment. Moreover, adults who see clearly are more productive at work and older adults are more likely to live independently and healthy.

Your support of this request will decrease the incidence of preventable vision loss among uninsured/underinsured older adults at high risk through public and professional education, early detection and treatment for vision problems, and free eye exams and eyeglasses for low income older adults.

In closing, I want to express my gratitude for your service and attention to these important issues. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you!