



**Written Testimony to the Ohio Representatives Make Blindness No Impediment to Caring for Minor**

From Kara B. Ayers, PhD

University of Cincinnati Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities

October 31, 2017

RE: House Bill 309: Make Blindness No Impediment to Caring for Minor

Sponsors: Rep Gonzales and Rep Rezabek

Chair Ginter, Vice Chair Hughes, Ranking Member Boyd, and Members of the Community and Family Advancement Committee:

Thank-you for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 309. If passed, this bill would prohibit discrimination on the basis of blindness alone in regards to caring for a minor. Bills like these are unfortunately needed to update OH R.C.§2151.414, which make disabilities grounds for termination of parental rights.

Policies like these are personally meaningful to me. My husband and I are both parents with disabilities. We are not blind, but use wheelchairs full-time. We have three amazing children who are 10 years, 7 years, and 7 months old. Like many parents with disabilities, we are acutely aware that stigma surrounding disability could strip us of our most cherished roles at any time. In addition to the personal devastation, the toll of even temporary separation on our children would be immeasurable. These are fears that many parents with disabilities face on a daily basis.

I am also familiar with disabled parenting from the perspective of a researcher. I am the Associate Director of the University of Cincinnati Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCCEDD). Our UCCEDD is part of a national network of UCEDDs that make up the Association of University Centers on Disability (AUCD). Per our federal authorization from the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act, UCEDDs are obligated to work towards a shared vision in which all Americans will live, work, and play together in their communities. I am also a co-founder of the Disabled Parenting Project and a consultant for the [National Center for Parents with Disabilities](#).

From the Rocking the Cradle Report conducted by the [National Council on Disability](#), we know that parents who are blind report extremely high rates of child removal and loss of parental rights. In addition to the emotional toll of disrupting families, these removals incur excessive and unnecessary costs to the child welfare and family court system. Parents who are blind are also more likely to lose custody of their children after divorce and face significant barriers to adopting children.

While I would prefer cross-disability legislation that would prohibit discrimination on the basis of all disability, this bill to protect the rights of blind parents is a step in the right direction and progress towards updating Ohio's laws that are currently not ethically or legally tenable. The U.S. Constitution limits a state's rights to interfere with a person's most basic decisions about family and parenthood. Ohio's current code, however, threatens removal on the sheer existence of disability and creates an atmosphere of doubt for the disability community.



HB 309 recognizes that there are a number of supports that can make parenting with a disability, including blindness, possible. Through my research, I'm exploring inherent strengths that parents with disabilities bring to their families. Disabled parents are often creative, skilled problem-solvers, detailed planners, and attuned to their environment and children. HB 309 in no way endangers children because child welfare can and should always investigate legitimate concerns of a child's safety. HB 309 simply specifies that the basis for investigation should never be speculation or hypothetical concern on the basis of blindness alone.

I believe in the protection of basic rights for all families in Ohio. I am eager to see Ohio consider cross-disability legislation related to parenting in the near future. HB 309 is an important step in recognition that the beauty and resilience of families is often within our differences.

Thank-you for the opportunity to provide testimony on an issue that is both personally and professionally very important to me.

Sincerely,

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Assistant Professor  
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