

June 15, 2017

Testimony to the Senate Finance Committee Public transit in the operating budget (House Bill 49)

Good morning Chairman Oleslager, Ranking Member Skindell and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Katie Frederick, I am the Executive Director of The American Council of the Blind of Ohio, a nonprofit organization representing Ohioans who are blind or visually impaired. The American Council of the Blind of Ohio is also a member of the Ohioans for Transportation Equity Coalition, a collaboration of advocacy organizations, agencies and community groups representing Ohio's urban, suburban and rural populations. We are asking for an increase in the transportation budget to bring Ohio's current transportation options into a state of good repair and ensure viable, accessible, affordable and sustainable transportation options for the economic future of Ohio.

As the Executive Director of a statewide nonprofit serving people who are blind or visually impaired, and as a person who is blind, access to accessible, affordable, sustainable transportation impacts me and people I speak to on a daily basis. One of the services The American Council of the Blind of Ohio provides is an information and referral service, offering Ohio resources to individuals and agencies who call our office. Many people call asking about transportation services in the Columbus area and around the state. I have received calls from concerned individuals who are currently employed, but due to cuts in transportation funding, fear job loss due to an inability to commute to and from work. There are individuals who are unable to get or take jobs offered to them due to an inability to get to the jobsite.

Access to transportation affects people's ability to find and maintain employment, get access to healthcare, shop for groceries, and live active productive lives in their communities. According to the 2015 Ohio Department of Transportation's (ODOT) Transit Needs study, Ohio ranks 45 out of the 50 states in public transportation investment. Inadequate state funding is compounded this year by a narrowing of the sales tax base, as the state removes Medicaid Managed Care services out of the sales tax and into the insurance tax. Eight of Ohio's largest transit agencies have a local sales tax levy on the state base. These transit agencies lose \$40 million a year, collectively, as a result of this tax change: the same amount that the state operating and transportation budgets invest in public transit. In other words, the entire state investment is being wiped out by this change to the sales tax, without a sustainable replacement.

The American Council of the Blind of Ohio and the Ohioans for Transportation Equity Coalition are asking that the loss to transit agencies from the changes to the sales tax base be replaced; that \$25 million in General Revenue Funds be appropriated for public transit, and that the earmark for public transit in the Volkswagon Settlement Funds, removed in the Senate's substitute budget bill, be reinstated. This is just a first step toward what the state should be providing. As recommended in the ODOT Transit Needs Study, a full ten percent (10%) of the ODOT transportation budget – about \$120 million a year now, rising to \$185 million a year by 2025, should be used to provide accessible affordable, sustainable transit options for all Ohioans.

Ohio was the first state to enact the Achieving a Better Life Experience, (ABLE) Act, helping people with disabilities and their families fund disability-related expenses, and people

with disabilities are pleased Ohio was a leader. People with disabilities are not proud to say, however, Ohio ranks 45 out of 50 in public transportation funding. The American Council of the Blind of Ohio and the Ohioans for Transportation Equity Coalition ask for specific increases for public transit:

- \$25 million a year in GRF funding;
- \$15 million a year in Volkswagon settlement funds and
- A full and sustainable replacement of the \$40 million lost to eight major public transit agencies with the changes in the sales tax base.

We ask for this increased funding in the budget for 2018-19 so Ohioans who need access to accessible, affordable sustainable transportation can live the lives they want in the communities they choose. Thank you for your time.