

Written Testimony of Greg Belhorn

Before Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee

February 28, 2017 Ohio SB 27 Hearing

Good afternoon, Senators, ladies, and gentlemen. My name is Greg Belhorn It is my honor to be here today to share a few thoughts regarding the importance of Senate Bill 27, as introduced to the 132nd General Assembly of the Ohio Senate. I want to thank Senator Beagle and the eight co-sponsors of this Bill for their support to officially designate Deaf History Month here in Ohio.

I am not a Deaf individual but I come here today to share a brief story. I hope to impress upon you why Ohio Deaf History Month is important not only to those who are Deaf and hard of hearing, but also for hearing individuals like me.

I have a very distinct memory from my childhood when I encountered a deaf individual and I didn't even realize it at the time. I was a young boy, perhaps eight or nine years old, and my parents had taken me to the Brown Derby restaurant off Hamilton Road on Columbus' east side. We were with family friends and after the server had taken our order and left the adults began talking that they thought the server was deaf. One of my adults at the table commented, "Isn't that great that she can work as a server even though she's deaf?" Everyone at the table agreed, almost as though it was an unbelievable accomplishment.

While that was just a passing moment in my childhood, that memory has resided with me for over 30 years. It's not the type of memory that one thinks of without some type of meaningful context. But for nearly 14 years, it has had very meaningful context to me.

When my oldest daughter, Reagan, was not much more than a year old, she was identified as being deaf. This was a tremendous shock to my wife and me, being both hearing. We didn't understand deafness or what this meant for our little girl. It was a time of fear, grief, and many, many questions.

Fortunately, we quickly learned that there is a wonderful community here in central Ohio of Deaf individuals. It is a community we grew to know and a culture about which we worked to learn. It is a culture based on a rich history. We learned that being Deaf isn't something to be uncomfortable with or

pitied. It isn't a barrier to having a rich, meaningful life. In fact it's quite the opposite. It provides opportunities to grow in many ways hearing individuals may take for granted.

Today my daughter, Reagan, is a freshman at Upper Arlington High School. She's exceptionally intelligent, an outstanding student, and active in theater. She'll be driving sooner than I realize and will be off to college not long after that. While she keeps most of this from me and shares with my wife, I do know that she has romantic interests as well. As the father of a beautiful teenage girl I have much to worry about. Her being deaf is not one of those things.

The reason I am here today is to humbly and respectfully ask that you support Senate Bill 27. It's my hope that Ohio Deaf History Month will foster the opportunity for people to learn about deafness and Deaf culture. It is my hope that people can learn, just as my wife and I have, that it is not a thing to be uncomfortable with or pitied.

It's my hope that regardless of what my daughter chooses to do professionally or personally, people don't look at her and say, "Isn't that great she can do that even though she's deaf?" If people have an understanding of deafness, its history, and its culture then they would know the only thing a deaf person cannot do is hear.

Thank you for your time today. I thank you in advance for your support of Senate Bill 27.