The Honorable Andrea White

Representative District 41

Ohio General Assembly

77 South High Street, 11th Floor

Columbus, OH 43215

SUBJECT: Including provisions to prohibit blindness from being used to deny or limit care of a minor in the 2021 Budget

Representative White:

I am a constituent in your district, and a member of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio. The National Federation of the Blind of Ohio, Ohio’s largest and oldest organization representing Ohio’s Blind citizens, proposed H.B. 188 in the 2019-20 legislative session. I am writing to ask you to support including H.B. 188’s language in the 2021 Budget

H.B. 188 would prohibit a person’s blindness from being used as the sole basis to deny or limit custody, parenting time, visitation, adoption, or service as a guardian or foster caregiver, of a minor child. Unfortunately, the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio continues to encounter situations where blindness has been used as the sole determining factor in making decisions regarding child custody and visitation. Consequently, The National Federation of the Blind of Ohio believes that passage of provisions prohibiting the use of blindness as a sole determining factor in these situations is essential for protecting the rights of Blind parents and caregivers, and the rights of the children impacted by these decisions.

I personally feel this is an extremely important issue because I have personally experienced this type of discrimination. When I was divorced in 2016 it was made clear to me that I would have absolutely no chance of getting custody of my children because of my blindness and hearing loss. Consequently, to ensure that I got some visitation rights I forgo fighting for custody at all. I have also witnessed the hardship and heartache caused by social workers swooping in to take a parents child simply because that social worker believes a Blind parent cannot take care of a child, without any consideration of their actual independent parenting sills.

Last year, H.B. 188 received strong bipartisan support in the House. H.B. 188 had two primary Sponsors Representative Erica Crawley (D-26th), and Representative Jon Cross (R-83). At the time H.B. 188 was approved by the House, the legislation had 48 cosponsors. In addition, the bipartisan support for H.B. 188 was so strong that the legislation passed out of Committee on a 13-0 vote and was approved by the House on a 93-0 vote. Unfortunately, there was insufficient time last year for H.B. 188 to be considered by the Senate. At the time H.B. 188 was passed by the House the Legislative Service Commission reported that the legislation would only result “minimal cost…”.

I and the National Federation of the Blind are now asking that the provisions of H.B. 188 from the 2019-20 legislative session be included in the 2021 Budget to ensure that the rights of blind parents and caregivers and the minor children they care for are protected as expeditiously as possible.

Please do not hesitate to contact the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio if you have questions regarding this proposal. You can contact our Legislative Director Eric Duffy at peduffy63@gmail.com or at 614-377-9877.

Sincerely,

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