



March 13, 2023

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Chair
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education and
Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
709 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and
Human Services, Education and
Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
172 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Baldwin and Ranking Member Capito:

On behalf of the National Federation of the Blind, I appreciate this opportunity to recommend an increased appropriation for the Independent Living Services for Older Blind Individuals (OIB) to ensure that blind Americans can live fulfilling and independent lives as they age.

The OIB provides grants to states for training and tools to help blind Americans age fifty-five or older live independently. The American Community Survey estimated that in 2018, there were 4,584,000 blind people who were fifty-five or older¹ and, according to the Centers for Disease Control, this number will increase rapidly due to diabetes and other chronic diseases that cause blindness.² For the past six fiscal years, Congress has appropriated \$33,317,000 each year to serve an eligible population of approximately 4,584,000 individuals. That averages out to roughly \$7.27 per eligible individual. This level of funding is woefully inadequate. In order for blind people to be self-reliant, they must have access to technology such as screen readers and Braille notetakers and the training to use them, as well as training in orientation and mobility and independent living skills. The limited funding for the OIB program is far from adequate to cover the cost of such training. Therefore, we urge Congress to dramatically increase funding for fiscal year 2024 from \$33,317,000, where it has remained stagnated for more than half a decade, to \$229,200,000. This increased appropriation would equate to \$50 per eligible person, and

¹ United States Census Bureau. American Community Survey. <https://data.census.gov/mdat/#/>.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2020. "Fast Facts of Common Eye Disorders." Last modified June 9, 2020.

<https://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/basics/ced/fastfacts.htm#:~:text=As%20of%202012%2C%204.2%20million.and%20our%20rapidly%20aging%20U.S.>

will help provide the training and tools needed for older blind Americans to live their lives independently.

We welcome the opportunity to have further dialogue regarding these very important matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Riccobono". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.

Mark Riccobono, President
National Federation of the Blind

CC: The Honorable Patty Murray, Chair, US Senate Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Susan Collins, Vice Chair, US Senate Committee on Appropriations