Dear Representatives Steve Chabot (District 1) and Michael R. Turner (District 10):

I am writing to you about a bill which is of great importance to me, and hope that you will see that support of this bill is valuable and needed.

I have been blind since birth, and have required reasonable accommodations under the ADA and IDEA throughout my education. When given these reasonable accommodations I, like other blind and disabled students, can perform on a very high level which is comparable to my non-disabled peers. I excelled in honors and AP classes, and graduated Cum Laude from Colerain High School in 2012. I am now a junior majoring in Music Therapy at the University of Dayton, and have had mixed experiences in accessibility.

I’ve been lucky enough to avoid many of the pitfalls blind students typically face in college, but I’ve had my share of problems accessing material in the classroom. Google Docs is notoriously inaccessible to the blind, and several times professors have advised small groups in my classes to use it as a means for communicating and organizing our information. It has even been used in my Music Therapy classes as a platform for storing clinical documentation. I am unable to read and edit in Google Drive platforms, so it is frustrating and difficult when I am asked to use these technologies to complete assignments or work on projects.

The Technology, Equality, and Accessibility in College and Higher Education Act (or the Teach Act) would establish guidelines for universities to ensure that electronic materials are accessible to all. The bill would allow for performance standards for accessibility to established to ensure that materials are accessible to the blind and disabled, would make sure that materials are in compliance with the Rehab Act of 1972, and would consider the use of inaccessible technologies in noncompliance with the Rehab Act and the ADA, as well as national and international accessibility standards. It would allow for all students with disabilities to have greater and more equal access to educational materials, which they do not have at the present time.

Google Docs is not the only accessibility problem in the classroom. I-Clickers (electronic devices students can use to silently select multiple choice answers shown on a screen), inaccessible course registration sites, and graphic course management platforms all cause accessibility barriers for students with disabilities. Often these students rely on computers even more than the average student to access university information, their grades and other personal information, and assignments they need to complete for class.

Please support this piece of legislation. It really does not require Universities to do anything more than they should be doing already, and would have a positive impact on the lives of thousands of students like me who, with reasonable accommodation and equal access, can perform just as well as non-disabled classmates in the academic arena. Some associations of higher education are opposed to the bill, but all it is promoting is more fair and equal access for students with disabilities.

Sincerely,

Kaiti Shelton