

Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee On Human Services
HB 5003 - Oregon Commission for the Blind
March 4th, 2021, 1pm
Oregon Legislative Assembly

RE:Public testimony before the OCB's Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on Human Services hearing

Committee
Co-Chair
Senator Kate Lieber
Co-Chair
Representative Rob Nosse
Member
Senator Sara Gelser
Member
Senator Tim Knopp
Member
Representative Winsvey Campos
Member
Representative Cedric Hayden
Member
Representative Duane Stark
Member
Representative Anna Williams

Dear Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services,

It's my honor to be before you to give my written testimony in support of the Oregon Commission for the Blind (OCB) 2021-23 budget. I'm blind, a client of the OCB, and I want to share with you the impact that OCB services and programs have had on my life.

I live and work in Eugene where the OCB has an office conveniently located near me. I'm proud to be blind and I'm proud to be an Oregonian. I can say that because through your support, I live, learn, and work independently because of the OCB.

I've been blind my entire adult life. Thanks to the OCB services being there for me, from being a college student, to an employee, to an active member in my community, I have received the singularly blind counseling, training, and skills I need. I've experienced my vision decline over the years and advancements in technology and the OCB has been there every step of the way to help with my changing needs.

The OCB taught me braille. It gave me control over my documents and notes. Now, I can confidently label items, keep personal notes, and make notes for my presentations.

The OCB put a long white cane in my hand and taught me how to use it. It was amazing. My world opened up. It gave me independence. It gave me my confidence. With that skill, I was eligible to be partnered with a guide dog. With my guide and my white cane, I independently travel where I need to go whether across town, Oregon, or the nation.

The OCB employs blind individuals who are expert in showing the blind how we can access the digital world. When my employer moved my computer system to the unfamiliar Office 365, I made the transition smoothly because of the understanding, humor, and problem-solving abilities of the OCB technology specialist. When I got my first smart phone, it was the OCB technology specialist who trained me in how to use its accessibility features which gave me the ability to easily connect with family and friends and download amazing apps like talking GPS.

The OCB employs counselors who have a long history of service and specific knowledge, experience, and understanding of the blind and our needs. Because of my counselor's competent and compassionate counseling, I've been able to accurately assess my goals and needs in pursuit of my education, employment, and my life as a well-adjusted proud blind Oregonian.

The OCB's value and strength for all Oregonians and blind Oregonians alike is grounded in considering blindness to be a natural part of the human condition, working from a position that the blind should self determine, and empowering blind Oregonians to be all we can be.

I'm aware Oregon is experiencing difficult times because of the COVID pandemic. You have your work cut out for you allocating Oregon's budget to ensure programs and services that provide the most benefit to Oregonians receive appropriate funding. Oregonians rely on you to make the right decisions. The Oregon Commission for the Blind is the right decision. The Oregon Commission for the Blind brings real value to Oregonians, and I urge the Committee to support the Oregon Commission for the Blind 2021-23 budget request.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Heidi von Ravensberg

