

Dear Representative DiGirolamo and Members of the Human Service Committee,

My name is John Holcomb II and I am a person who is deaf-blind. I have a severe hearing impairment but, I'm able to speak. However, I still need SSP's help in my daily living.

Take something simple such as going to the store. I am unable to use public transportation. My hearing is not good enough that I can walk down the street on my own as I cannot localize traffic. I'd also be unable to hear a person approach me to ask if I needed their assistance in crossing the street. I can't hear when the bus is coming, much less the announcements to tell me what stop I've arrived at. The only way I can get somewhere on my own is if it is door to door. Para Transit works well, as does using services such as Uber or Lyft. When scheduling Lyft, I can contact the driver ahead of time thru the app and tell them to meet me at the end of my driveway and guide me to their vehicle. When the app notifies me they are a minute or two away, I then go outside and wait for them and contact them so they know how to best assist me. Once I get where I'm going, I have the driver wait with me until my SSP arrives. Once in the store, I need help to tell me what items there are as I am totally blind with no vision at all. But also, when requesting assistance, I am unable to understand what the person is saying unless they are right up on my good ear and speak directly into my ear. Sometimes this works fine but other times they have accents or are from other countries, so without an SSP there, I'm not able to understand them. The SSP also guides me into the store as well, since my hearing isn't good enough to just be able to walk anywhere in public without assistance. An SSP's job is not only to act as a guide for the deaf-blind person, but also to help with communication needs. So, whenever I'm going to any social event, I need to have an SSP with me. Before I'm notified of who may be at the event, they give me visual information. Things such as how big the room is, how many tables there are, how many people are in the room, if food or drinks are out and if so what there is. They'd tell me who is at the event, give me the option to choose who I'd like to sit besides, then help me when I do not understand the person whom I'm sitting next too. Or they'll sit next to me and tell me what somebody is saying from across the table.

Dinners must be done at a quiet place for me to have any hope in hearing anything. But even at that, I still need an SSP. I am unable to understand the server in a lot of cases. Also, the SSP reads me the menu as not a lot of restaurants have them in braille. Say it's a sandwich shop, and I'm getting a drink, they'd be the ones to let me feel each cup, so I have some idea as to what is considered small, medium or large.

If I have questions about what is on the sandwich and need to ask somebody at the counter, the SSP will be the one to tell me what that person says. These are the things I like to know as a person. But other deaf-blind people are different. Some, for example while walking outside into a building want to know even more visual information such as if they are passing trees, what kind there are, some idea as to how big they are etc. Still others, like me like to know whom I'm passing or if somebody yells hi from across the walkway, that the SSP will tell me who said hi so I can respond. You see its pretty simple really. Anything to make it so the person who has a combined hearing/vision loss, it is the SSP's job to make sure they get as much information as a sighted/hearing person. And get this information according to the deaf-blind persons preference's. Give them the visual information that they care to know about. As a deaf-blind person, it is your job to tell the SSP what information you think is important. And what

communications you find important to know about. That way, a deaf-blind person can make their own choices about life and be able to live it fully.