

Testimony of Thomas H. Earle, Esq. CEO of Liberty Resources, Inc.

On House Bill 2069 to amend Act 139 for Support Services for Deafblind Individuals

before the Committee on Human Services

Chair Gene DiGerolamo and Minority Chair Angel Cruz

Wednesday, April 11, 2018 9:30 – 11:00 am

Introduction: Good morning Committee Members. My name is Thomas Earle, and I am the CEO of Liberty Resources, Inc, the Center for Independent Living serving the Philadelphia area. I am also the Treasurer of the Pennsylvania Council on Independent Living and the Chairperson of the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations. I am here this morning to offer my full support for HB 2069 to secure future funding for the Support Services Program for people who are deafblind in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

- 1) There are currently over 509,000 Pennsylvania residents who are both Deaf/Hearing Impaired and are Blind/Visually impaired.¹

- 2) Many individuals who are completely Deaf and Blind lead lives of deep isolation from many aspects of life in the community, including communication and social interaction, employment opportunities, and other activities of daily living that most non-sensory impaired individuals enjoy every day.

¹ Federal Communications Commission, Implementation of the Twenty-First Century Communication and Video Accessibility Act of 2010, Section 105, Relay Services for Deaf-Blind Individuals. Released April 6, 2011. Page 68 of report.

- 3) As a Center for Independent Living serving thousands of disabled individuals in the Philadelphia Region, we continue to be understaffed, underfunded, and ill-equipped to effectively serve the unique independent living needs of people who are Deafblind.
- 4) The Services Support Program developed by our sister CIL, the Center for Independent Living of Central Pennsylvania is an innovative and well-designed model that has successfully begun the specialized training and capacity to serve this most vulnerable group of Pennsylvania citizens.
- 5) With current funding, the Support Services Program (SSP) is able to only serve 80 individuals who are Deafblind.
- 6) Pennsylvania can and must do more. Act 139 should be amended to establish an appropriate funding level that will ensure that the SSP can be sustained on annual basis to better serve the Deafblind community.
- 7) The Pennsylvania Council on Independent Living and the network of Centers for Independent Living also strongly support HB 2069 as an effective resource to address the independent living needs of the underserved and isolated Deafblind community.

Conclusion: In closing, as individual who is legally blind from a progressive form of blindness called Retinitis Pigmentosa, I am especially sensitive to the needs of children, adults and seniors who are afflicted with sensory disabilities and accordingly, I implore the state legislature to swiftly pass this simple amendment to sustain this vitally important program for the Deafblind community.