

Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Burke, and Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee, my name is Michael Leiterman, I am here as a representative of The National Federation of the Blind of Ohio. The National Federation of the Blind of Ohio is the largest advocacy organization of the blind in Ohio. I am here today to urge you to please remove section 5123.603 in the state budget that creates unnecessary legislative oversight of a private nonprofit corporation, Disability Rights Ohio.

Disability Rights Ohio is an independent organization designated by the governor, regulated by federal law as the Protection and Advocacy system and Client Assistance Program in Ohio to investigate instances of abuse and neglect and to protect the rights of people with disabilities. No other private advocacy or legal organization is subject to this type of proposed review.

DRO helps elevate the voice of self-advocates and gives individuals and organizations a resource they need to be effective in their advocacy. They have helped me fight for my own rights as a person with disabilities. When in college I made the decision to go to law school I was receiving services from a state agency known as Bureau for Services for the Visually Impaired (BSVI). I had exercised my right of informed choice in making this career choice to pursue a law degree, however much to my dismay I was told that BSVI would not support me in my endeavor to become a lawyer. At that time I contacted Legal Rights Ohio who is now Disability Rights Ohio for assistance. Together with DRO's assistance I appealed the state decision to not support me in my career choice. Fortunately I was successful in my appeal efforts thanks to the support of DRO. DRO's tireless work has touched the lives of every member of The National Federation of the Blind of Ohio and their family members, from voting rights to equal education and beyond. Disability Rights Ohio has been an invaluable organization fighting for my rights and those across Ohio. People with disabilities deserve an independent voice to uphold laws and fight against discrimination, without retaliation.

I urge you to support people with disabilities and ask you to eliminate this damaging provision from the state budget.

Thank you,

Michael Leiterman