



## **Testimony on the Ohio School for the Deaf Budget Provisions of House Bill 64, the FY16-17 Biennial Budget**

Ohio Senate  
Finance Subcommittee on Education  
Senator Cliff Hite, Chair  
April 29, 2015

Doug Lowery, Superintendent  
Ohio School for the Deaf

Chairman Hite, Vice Chair Sawyer and members of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Education, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding the Ohio School for the Deaf budget provision sections of House Bill 64, the Fiscal Year 2016-2017 Biennial Budget. I am Doug Lowery, superintendent at the Ohio School for the Deaf.

The Ohio School for the Deaf has been serving students with hearing impairments and other disabilities for 186 years. We currently serve 194 students at our Clintonville campus and work to provide outreach services to approximately 3,500 students statewide. Our mission is to provide comprehensive education for Ohio's deaf and hard-of-hearing students that encourages independence and lifelong learning to promote social development and cultural awareness; prepare students to attain their potential and become contributing members of their communities; collaborate with schools and other educational programs serving deaf and hard-of-hearing students and their families to meet the individual needs of each student - all via a barrier-free communication environment using American Sign Language (ASL) and English. The governor's budget recommends GRF appropriation for the Ohio State School for the Deaf of \$10.3 million in FY16 and \$10.7 million in FY17. This represents growth of \$1.5 million, or 17.5 percent, in FY16 and another \$424,000, or 4.1 percent in FY17.

Educating deaf learners is a complex and highly specialized undertaking. Deafness is a severe disability that impacts the development of speech, language acquisition and academic skills. Without language development in the home, children grow up without words to describe what they see around them, knowledge of everyday events or the incidental learning that comes from watching TV, listening to children's music or rhymes, or storybooks read aloud. Without language and the ability to hear language, instruction becomes dependent on the use of exceptional methods. These methods include small class sizes, assistive communication devices, amplification and specially trained teachers who are fluent in sign language. Specialists at the school provide speech language therapy, tutoring in American Sign Language, occupational and physical therapy and counseling. Our efforts, together with the support of the state, enable students to leave high school ready to go to work or attend post-secondary education and training. The majority of the recommended increase in GRF appropriations is to ensure current staff is fully funded and recommended staffing levels are maintained. The Ohio School for the Deaf is excited to have a growing student population. We have added an additional 40 students over the past four years and are projecting continued growth over the next two years. As such, the governor's budget recommends additional funding to meet the needs of our growing student population.

Local school districts often find it difficult to meet the comprehensive needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The residential component of our program supports the work of the educational program and assists students in acquiring social-emotional and independent living skills. Staff designated as youth leaders provide structured activities for all residential students during non-class hours, Monday through Thursday, with

students usually returning home for weekends and holidays. Our residential students sometimes participate in summer programs to extend their learning opportunities beyond the traditional school year. Funding limitations forced us to cancel our summer programming last year. In order to provide these programs for students identified as needing extended school year services, additional GRF funding is recommended in each fiscal year.

Our school is a home away from home for many of our students who live outside daily commuting distance. Our campus operates like a small college and shares food service, maintenance, human resources, custodial services, transportation, health services and business operations with our sister school, the Ohio State School for the Blind. Our residential facility was part of an overall \$40 million facility upgrade project to both school facilities. Recent renovation allowed for expanded residential space and 12 new dormitories to be built on campus. These new facilities are state of the art and provide the opportunity for our students to be both comfortable and safe while in residence on our campus. Additional funding is recommended for the increased costs associated with the operation of these facilities, including maintenance, food service and utilities. The safety and security of our students is a top priority. This is why we need to have 24-hour security to act as a first line of defense for any threat to the health, safety and welfare of our students. Additional funding is recommended to enhance contracted security services.

Outside of the Ohio School for the Deaf, students who are deaf and hearing impaired are often served in locations where specialized programs and services do not exist or are limited. The school provides support services to students, parents and service providers in public school environments through our grant-funded outreach program. Outreach focuses on training and technical assistance, rather than direct services to students, except for our Interactive Video Distance Learning program through which we teach American Sign Language to small groups of deaf and hard-of-hearing students attending public schools. We also provide in-depth evaluations at the request of local school districts as they examine students' needs to assist with individualized education program development. We support educational interpreters around the state in improving their skills, exposing them to best practice in the field and maintaining licensure. Our outreach department works closely with the department of education, educational service centers and other groups to provide service to severe, low-incidence students and to assist local school districts in meeting students' needs.

The Ohio School for the Deaf is an important educational option for students who are deaf or hearing impaired throughout the state. We work to help our students gain the knowledge and life skills necessary to live independent and productive lives. We welcome this challenge and are inspired daily by the students and families we serve. We also have achieved these goals at funding levels that have remained the same over the past six years. The recommended increases included in the governor's budget will allow the school to continue to provide a high-quality education to Ohio's deaf and hearing impaired students and ensure their safety and security.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I would now be happy to answer any questions you have.