



OHIO CONNECTION

American Council of the Blind of Ohio

ACB'S LEGISLATIVE IMPERATIVES FOR 2025

The following legislative imperatives represent several key issues that ACB seeks to have reintroduced and passed in the 119th Congress. These bills will help ACB members in furthering independence and bettering quality of life.

The Medical Device Nonvisual Accessibility Act

The majority of home use medical devices and outpatient equipment utilizes digital display interfaces that are inaccessible to blind, low vision, and DeafBlind users. Class 2 and Class 3 medical devices such as glucose monitors, blood pressure readers, and at-home chemotherapy treatments do not have any non-visual accessibility features like text to speech output, tactile markings, or audible tones built in. As a result, people who are blind, low vision, and DeafBlind cannot independently manage their health from the privacy of their own homes in the same ways as people who are not disabled.

In the last session of congress, this bipartisan piece of legislation was introduced in both the House and Senate by Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) and Senators Mike Braun (R-IN) and Maggie Hassan (D-NH), to ensure that medical equipment with a digital display is accessible and that people with disabilities can take back control of their health. We are hopeful it will quickly be reintroduced. This legislation would require the Food and Drug Administration to consider non-visual accessibility when approving Class 2 and Class 3 medical equipment and devices with a digital display to ensure access for patients with disabilities.

The Websites and Software Applications Accessibility Act

Access to websites, applications and online services impacts most aspects of everyday life, and the COVID-19 pandemic has made digital inclusion more important than ever. There is a need for enforcement standards that clearly state websites, applications, and online services must be accessible to people with disabilities. People who are blind, low vision, and DeafBlind face countless barriers when accessing workplace portals, educational platforms, healthcare and public health information, transportation services, shopping, and entertainment over the Internet.

In the last session of Congress, Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) introduced this legislation (S. 4998), and Rep. John Sarbanes (D-MD) along with Rep. Pete Sessions (R-TX) introduced a version of the bill in the House of Representatives (H.R. 9021). We are hopeful it will quickly be reintroduced. This bill would establish clear and enforceable accessibility standards for websites and software applications. The Websites and Software Applications Accessibility Act would set clear, enforceable accessibility standards, and establish a technical assistance center and advisory committee to provide advice and guidance on accessible websites and applications. It would also authorize a study on addressing emerging technologies.

The Communications, Video, and Technology Accessibility Act

The 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act (CVAA) guaranteed access for people with disabilities to advanced communications services, telecommunications hardware and software, accessible video displays and user interfaces and digital apparatuses, and required the delivery of audio-described content. For more than ten years, ACB and its members have worked to implement and enforce the CVAA, and in several key aspects, we have reached the limits of what the CVAA is able to enforce.

It is time for Congress to update the accessible video and communications requirements of the CVAA. Sen. Edward J. Markey (D-MA) and Rep. Anna G. Eshoo (D-CA) introduced the Communications, Video, and Technology Accessibility (CVTA) Act (H.R. 9333 and S. 5121). The CVTA reaffirms our nation's commitment to accessible communications and video technologies for people who are blind, low vision, and DeafBlind. Once passed, this legislation will update existing requirements for accessible media, video user interfaces, and video conferencing services.

SKI FOR LIGHT

By Brant Adams

For the last several years, I have had the privilege of attending the Black Hills Regional Ski for Light four-day winter sports event which is held every January in Deadwood, South Dakota. Their goal is to include people with different abilities in winter sports. This is a unique event, as it includes cross country skiing, snowshoeing, downhill skiing, and snowmobiling, along with lots of time for socialization. You might think South Dakota is too far away, but the person I met from Australia might disagree.

I tried cross country skiing for the first time on day one, and I learned that on a warm winter day laying on your back in the snow can be quite comfortable. I

decided to leave that to others, and switched to snowshoeing—it gets me to the same place as skiing, and I fall down a lot less!

During the event, you can go on a half-hour snowmobile ride. They're quite fast and lots of fun if you dress properly to avoid freezing. I have not yet braved downhill skiing, but I have several friends who do. Equipment is provided to accommodate most disabilities. For example, there are skis designed so that a person who uses a wheelchair can ski and blind skiers use a bamboo pole and a guide.

One of the best parts is that after a long day of winter sports, there is plenty of time for socializing in the evenings, sometimes well into the night.

If you are interested in a vacation and trying winter sports, I encourage you to check out Black Hills Regional Ski for Light at <https://www.bhsfl.org> or on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/share/g/1Fb8pHxbbQ/>.

META GLASSES: THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UNEXPECTEDLY USEFUL

By Renee Arrington-Johnson

For a while, I'd been exploring assistive technology options to enhance my independence and access information more readily. Smart glasses, with their potential to provide real-time information about my surroundings, had been particularly intriguing, however, I was hesitant. Most smart glasses on the market, including the Meta Ray-Ban smart glasses, weren't designed specifically for blind users, nor were they developed with significant input from the blind community.

As the most available and reasonably priced option, I began researching the Meta Ray-Ban smart glasses. I attended conferences where they were discussed, devoured YouTube reviews from blind creators, and read countless articles. I also closely followed the development of EchoVision smart glasses, designed *by* blind people *for* blind people. These seemed like the ideal solution, but their release was still several months away.

After careful consideration, I decided to take the plunge and purchase the Meta Ray-Ban smart glasses. I knew they weren't perfect, but they offered immediate access to some helpful features.

Meta Ray-Ban Features

Meta and Ray-Ban partnered to create these smart glasses. They integrate technology into a classic eyewear design, featuring:

- **Dual 5MP cameras:** Capture photos and videos from a first-person perspective.
- **Open-ear audio:** Built-in speakers allow you to listen to music, podcasts, and take calls without blocking out ambient sound.
- **Three microphones:** Enable clear voice capture for calls and voice commands.
- **Touch controls:** Allow you to control music playback, capture photos/videos, and answer calls.
- **Integration with the Meta View app:** Allows you to manage your media and settings.

How They've Helped Me

I've found the glasses surprisingly useful in several areas:

- **Kitchen and Home:** They excel at reading labels and text on items in my kitchen, pantry, and refrigerator. This has made cooking and meal preparation much easier. I can quickly identify spices, ingredients, and cooking instructions.
- **Navigation and Shopping:** While walking, the glasses can identify objects and provide basic descriptions, which helps with general awareness. In stores, they can read labels and price tags, and even help me identify aisle names and shelf contents.
- **Media Consumption:** Reading text on the TV is now much more accessible.

Areas for Improvement

The glasses are not without their limitations:

- **Text Reading:** While they can read short texts well, they often summarize longer passages, which isn't ideal for things like mail or magazine articles. Improvements continue to be made, but getting the information that you want can be tricky if you are looking for detail.
- **Name Recognition:** The AI sometimes struggles with proper names, requiring careful phrasing of voice commands. Again, as the software evolves and people learn commands to work around this issue, some success can be realized.

Unexpectedly Useful Features

Some features have become more valuable than I initially anticipated:

- **Calls and Messaging:** Answering phone calls and replying to texts hands-free while walking or doing chores is incredibly convenient. And it is not like I do not have other bluetooth earbuds, open ear, and around-the-neck devices. I have used them all. The integration into the glasses just works better for me.
- **Open-Ear Audio:** I appreciate the open-ear design, as it allows me to stay aware of my surroundings while listening to music or podcasts.

Accessibility Enhancements

- **Be My Eyes Integration:** Using Be My Eyes with the glasses is a game-changer. The hands-free aspect makes it so much easier to get real-time assistance from sighted volunteers.
- **Aira Compatibility:** With a bit of setup involving a third-party chat app, I can even connect to Aira, a professional visual interpreting service, through the glasses.

The Best Part? The Price!

Perhaps the biggest bonus was the price. I managed to get the glasses on sale and was able to combine that with the generous matching grant program from ACB-Ohio. In the end, I only paid \$127 for them! This made the purchase an even more worthwhile investment. While the Meta Ray-Ban smart glasses weren't designed with blind users in mind, they offer a valuable set of tools that have significantly improved my daily life. I look forward to future enhancements to their technology that prioritize the needs of the blind community.

MATCHING GRANTS NOW AVAILABLE

ACB-Ohio's matching grants can be a big help when paying for expensive adaptive equipment; they cover half the cost of one item, up to \$1000 dollars. Examples include, but are not limited to, screen readers, braille displays, CCTVs and other magnifiers.

Complete the online form (<https://www.acbohio.org/matching-grants-application/>) or call the office at 614-261-3561 for help filling out the form, and supply either an invoice showing the expected cost or a receipt from the vendor within 90 days of purchase. If an item has been purchased, ACBO will send the buyer a check for the approved amount, and if the item has not yet been purchased, ACBO will send funds directly to the vendor. Application is not complete until all required documents are received.

The program also provides funding for ACB-Ohio chapter projects. If your chapter has an idea for a project but lacks the means to make it happen, apply for a matching grant and you could receive up to \$1,000.

If you have any questions, feel free to email matching grants committee chair Rachel Densmore at rachel@acbohio.org.

VISION LOSS SUPPORT GROUP OF WAYNE COUNTY

By Catherine Bister

Perhaps the greatest challenge to vision loss is isolation from emotional and practical supports. This can be particularly true in rural communities that often lack access to basic services and tools for adjusting to vision loss. Support groups can bridge the gap between isolation and connection, bringing people together to help each other through this challenging life event.

I recently started a support group in Wayne County, a rural community with limited services for the blind. During the planning phase, I connected with Beth Hudson, a local transportation advocate, and Amanda Hilty, a professional counselor. Together, we decided on a format, found a space, and advertised the meetings. We decided topics, speakers, and discussions would be geared toward helping people who are blind, have low vision, are struggling with vision loss, or who are supporting someone with low vision or blindness.

ACBO members have traveled from Cleveland and Columbus to share their expertise and offer support. The group enjoyed a talk on orientation and mobility (O & M) by Murray McKinsey in February. In March, we enjoyed an informative and lively discussion on adaptive technology, adapting to vision loss, and strategies for daily living with Columbus chapter member Dan Kelley and his wife, Marie, from Kelley Vision and Technology Services.

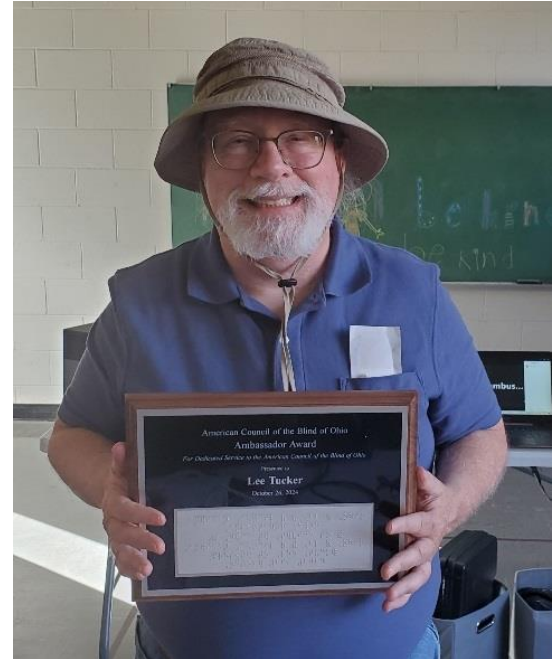
Future topics include fun with tactile games, advocacy groups, ask the doctor, and much more. We plan to add social and recreational events as well as connect people for small discussion groups.

The Vision Loss Support Group meets on the first Saturday of the month at 10 a.m. in the conference room at the East Wayne County Public Library, 220 W. Liberty St., in Wooster. For more information, call or text Catherine Bister at 330-464-6466.

MEET TWO ACBO AWARD WINNERS

ACB-Ohio awards honor those who go above and beyond to enrich the lives of people who are blind and low vision. Lee Tucker and the Clovernook Center are two recent recipients who certainly exemplify that ideal.

Lee Tucker, longtime treasurer of the Columbus chapter, received the Ambassador Award, which honors in individual who has worked diligently to support ACB-Ohio and the blind and low vision community. Lee is always eager to pitch in wherever help is needed, and his efforts keep things running smoothly. He ensures members always feel welcome, heard, and appreciated, and he checks in on members who might be feeling under the weather or isolated. You can often find Lee offering a reassuring elbow to guide someone, helping plan social events, or giving rides when paratransit leaves someone stranded. A retired IT professional, he helps visually impaired residents of Central Ohio by setting up computers, streaming devices, screen reading software, and other technology. As nominator Melody Holloway said, “He uses his sight and intelligence, his kind, compassionate, and patient nature, as well as his dependability and dedication, to contribute to the growth, welfare, and quality of life for members of the blind and low vision community.”



Ambassador Award winner Lee Tucker



Clovernook leaders accepting the Employer of the Year Award

Cincinnati's Clovernook Center received ACB-Ohio's Employer of the Year Award, which honors an Ohio employer that has hired and made accommodations for employees who are blind or visually impaired. For over 100 years, the center's many programs have provided life-enriching opportunities while empowering people who are blind or low vision to lead active, productive, and independent lives. Clovernook's Braille Printing House produces books, magazines, tactile graphics, and other materials

for the National Library Services and braille users worldwide, while providing employment opportunities for blind and visually impaired individuals. The largest braille producer in the US, Clovernook employs transcribers and proofreaders, and employs many people with disabilities in other positions, including the manufacturing, assembly, and packaging contract services the center provides. Clovernook provides vocational testing, job placement, job coaching, and employment opportunities at the center and out in the community. Thank you, Clovernook, for all you do to help people with disabilities live independently!

ADVOCACY ALERT: CONSUMER FINANCIAL PROTECTION BUREAU

From American Council of the Blind in Alexandria, VA

Actions taken by the new administration have threatened the elimination of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. To help illustrate the importance of such a federal agency, the National Consumer Law Center is collecting real lived experiences of fraud or other related experiences. Please read the description below and submit a story if you can.

We are looking for stories of people impacted by problems involving consumer financial issues, such as bank accounts, overdraft fees, student loans, debt collection, medical debt, credit reporting, fraud and payment apps, mortgages, auto loans, remittances, etc.

We especially would like stories of people who have been helped by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, used its financial education materials, relied on a rule, or just have a story that shows the need for the CFPB. Stories involving overdraft fees, medical debt or payment apps are also especially welcome.

Ideally, we'd love people willing to talk publicly, but any story is helpful.

If you do, please fill out the short story collection form at <https://tinyurl.com/3um52dxy>.

TWO SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS THANK ACB-OHIO

Seventeen years ago, ACBO established endowed scholarships at Ohio State University, Wright State University, and University of Toledo. The universities award these to students who are blind or visually impaired or educators of students who are blind or visually impaired. Here, two scholarship winners from Ohio State introduce themselves and express their gratitude.

My name is Bryanna Watts. I am a senior at The Ohio State University studying Primary Education with Visual Impairments. I am from Bellefontaine, Ohio, and have always known that this was the school for me. My family used to take trips to Columbus and watch the games together. This school has always felt like home to me. I am an active volunteer at the Ohio State School of the Blind, which has taught me to be a better community member. I am a member of the Human Development and Family Sciences Club. I minored in this and found so much joy thinking about the different family theories and learning about milestones I should see when looking at people.

I am writing to express my deepest gratitude for awarding me a scholarship from the American Council of the Blind of Ohio Scholarship Fund. This was extremely important for helping me pursue my education here at The Ohio State University.

This opportunity has relieved some financial stress and has given me the push I need to finish my semester worry-free and happy to work on myself academically and personally. I am striving to make the most of this opportunity and giving back to my community in the future.

Thank you for this opportunity and kindness as well as your belief in my future.

***Sincerely,
Bryanna Watts***

Thank you so much for supporting me as a recipient of your American Council of the Blind of Ohio Scholarship! I am so thankful and appreciative of the gift that you have given me and my family. We will use this to help pay for my tuition while allowing me more time to save up money to begin my future after graduation this spring!

I am a fifth year Primary and Visual Impairment Education major, but I struggled to find where I fit into my major for a few semesters. My first year at Ohio State I was a Spanish Education Major, and in my second year, I was placed in an elementary after school care for one of my classes. That is where I fell in love with the elementary side of education. This placement had me thinking about what my life would look like if I changed my major and pursued an elementary education career. While I was pondering my thoughts, I was given an opportunity to tutor second graders in literacy, and this was such a large factor in my decision to switch majors. Working with the second graders was often the best part of my week, and it made me feel like that was where I needed to be. After the first few weeks of tutoring, I switched my major from Spanish Education to Primary Education, however, my advisor told me that I should look into dual enrolling in the

visual impairment major so that I could broaden my abilities within education. I looked into this major, spoke with my parents, and then I decided that it was something that I wanted to pursue. So that is how I came to the major that I have been accepted into today.

Now, at Ohio State, I have had the wonderful experience of being placed in a K-2nd grade classroom at Ohio State School for the Blind. That truly opened my eyes to all of the amazing ways there are to educate students with any ability as well as the importance to give back to our community in any way we can. Again, I would like to thank you for this special opportunity to focus on my experiences in the classroom as I finish my time here at Ohio State and begin to build my future.

*Sincerely,
Abigail Dadich*

SUSTAINING FEDERAL POLICIES AND PROGRAMS EMPOWERING PEOPLE EXPERIENCING VISION LOSS TO CONTINUE CONTRIBUTING TO AMERICA

From American Council of the Blind in Alexandria, VA

Blind individuals contribute to society in countless meaningful ways, just like anyone else. We are taxpayers, business owners, employees, consumers, homeowners, veterans, students, and seniors. We excel in various fields such as education, arts, technology, science, sports, and so much more.

However, specific federal policies and programs must be sustained by Congress to empower all Americans experiencing vision loss to continue contributing to our economic and social life. These laws and programs provide education, rehabilitation, employment, and opportunities for a healthy, fulfilling, and independent life.

Essential Laws and Programs for the Independence of People with Vision Loss:

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973

This law provides rehabilitation services for people with disabilities. It also prohibits disability discrimination by the federal government, federal contractors, and recipients of federal funds. This law has historically opened the door to countless employment and other opportunities for people with disabilities, including people who are blind or who have low vision.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

This law provides equal opportunity by prohibiting discrimination against people with disabilities by private and public employers, state and local governments and public accommodations. It enables blind and low vision people to participate equally and fully in all areas of our economy and society.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

School districts receive federal funding to provide special education and services that blind school-age children need to learn and compete in employment and to access higher educational opportunities.

The Older Individuals Who are Blind Program

This program provides funding to each state for targeted services to seniors experiencing vision loss. These services enable seniors to remain in their own homes and to avoid unwanted, unnecessary, and costly institutionalization in nursing homes.

The National Library Services

The program provides funding for audio and Braille books and other reading material to state and regional libraries for distribution to people who are blind or have low vision. Together with the Free Matter for the Blind privilege under the U.S. Postal Service, students can receive needed materials that set them up for remarkable success.

The Department of Transportation

Provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act and other related laws enforced by DOT enable the blind and low vision community to travel independently to places of employment, public accommodations, and other social events.

Newsletter Committee: Brant Adams, Rachel Densmore, Katie Frederick, Jenna McCartney, Michelle Spillan, Malaina VanderWal

As always, thanks to the contributors: **American Council of the Blind, Brant Adams, Renee Arrington Johnson, Catherine Bister, and Michelle Spillan.** The *Ohio Connection* is a quarterly publication of the American Council of the Blind of Ohio. Please submit your material in print or via email and include your name and phone number. Send items to acbo.newsletter@gmail.com or send them to the address below. **The summer issue deadline is May 15.**

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FREE MATTER
FOR THE BLIND

ACB-OHIO DATEBOOK

APRIL 5, ACBO BOARD MEETING, 2:30 P.M., VIA ZOOM (USE MEETING CODE 6142613561)

APRIL 10, MEMBERSHIP CALL VIA ZOOM, 7 P.M., VIRTUAL MIXER - GET TO KNOW YOUR ACB-OHIO NEIGHBORS!

MAY 7, ACBO ON THE RADIO, 11 A.M., VOICECORPS.ORG

MAY 15, SUMMER NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

JUNE 4, ACBO ON THE RADIO, 11 A.M., VOICECORPS.ORG

JULY 4-11, ACB NATIONAL CONVENTION, DALLAS, TX

