



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Ohio Sight Centers applaud the Department of Medicaid for coverage of white canes**

[COLUMBUS] – A rule proposed by the Ohio Department of Medicaid (Medicaid) to provide coverage of white canes as durable medical equipment was finalized today, making Ohio the first state in the country to provide coverage for the tool used by individuals that are blind or have low vision. The Cleveland Sight Center, Cincinnati Association for the Blind & Visually Impaired and The Sight Center of Northwest Ohio expressed strong support for adoption of the rule.

“Vision loss affects every part of an individual’s life, adding to the stress of this loss is the patchwork of insurance coverage that these individuals face,” said John Mitchell of the Cincinnati Association for the Blind & Visually Impaired. “We are elated that Medicaid took a step forward towards greater insurance equity for these individuals.”

Ohio Sight Centers had previously advocated for coverage of white canes in House Bill 587, sponsored by Representatives Marlene Anielski (R- Walton Hills) and Darrell Kick (R- Loudonville). The bill received a number of hearings in the Ohio House while Medicaid contemplated making the change administratively.

“We appreciate all of the work of our bill sponsors, Representatives Anielski and Kick,” said Larry Benders, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Cleveland Sight Center. “Their personal interest and dedication to improving the lives of individuals with visual impairments is commendable.”

First used in 1921, the white cane is used for navigation purposes and as a tool to attract attention and increase awareness for its user. They mark paths, signal the user to an obstacle, and improve the confidence of individuals with visual disabilities.

“Our orientation and mobility specialists assist individuals that are blind or have low vision to regain their independence,” said Stacey Butts, Executive Director of The Sight Center of Northwest Ohio. “In updating this rule to provide coverage for white canes, the state is signaling support for individuals that have for too long been overlooked by the system.”

The Medicaid rule 5160-10-30 includes coverage for ambulation aids under durable medical equipment, which previously covered canes, crutches or walkers but excluded coverage of white canes. The rule will take effect January 1, 2019, and individuals should check with local providers on availability of Medicaid eligible white canes.

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