# Introducing Teddie-Joy’s Law

## A Comprehensive Commitment to Older Americans with Vision Loss

### The Problem

* Since its enactment into law nearly 60 years ago, the Older Americans Act (OAA) has failed to acknowledge and properly address one of the largest populations of older Americans in the country, older people living with vision loss. As a result, these older Americans are uniformly shut out of America’s primary national strategy to ensure the safety, independence, daily wellbeing and productivity of our nation’s aging population.
* Forty years ago, and for the first time to partially compensate for this shameful neglect, the US Congress funded the Independent Living Services for Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) program authorized under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. This program targets resources through the vocational rehabilitation system to offer a measure of specialized services meeting the unique needs of older people with vision loss. However, this tiny discretionary program currently funded at 33.3 million, administered by the US Department of Education, can currently only serve less than 3% of the eligible population, and its low funding levels limit the program’s reach to only the most rudimentary array of services.
* But even if the OIB program were fully funded, a whole-of-government approach is required both to most effectively integrate the OIB program with America’s network of aging resources and to ensure a comprehensive commitment to meeting the growing challenge of aging with vision loss in America.

### The Solution: Congress Should Enact Teddie-Joy’s Law and Will -

* Thoroughly update the Older Americans Act (OAA) to infuse throughout the OAA’s text the formal recognition of older people living with vision loss and the vision-related rehabilitation and other critical services that must be integrated into America’s national aging strategy.
* Reposition and strengthen the Independent Living Services for Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) program by setting mandatory and more appropriate threshold funding levels, allowing the program to keep pace with cost of living and other factors to ensure maintenance of effort, focusing program resources on the highest priority services, and coordinating such services with those made available outside of the OIB program.
* Bring all federal authorities together with national consumer and service provider stakeholders to develop and implement a whole-of-government strategy to ensure that older people with vision loss can most effectively navigate and gain greater access to the network of available technology and services they need to live safe, independent and productive lives, to spur innovation in the delivery of such services and technologies, to increase the availability of specialized professionals offering appropriate vision-related services, and to break down the bureaucratic silos that burden the achievement of these objectives. ([Proposed-Teddie-Joys-Law-Draft.pdf (visionservealliance.org)](https://visionservealliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Proposed-Teddie-Joys-Law-Draft.pdf))

## Who was Teddie-Joy?

Teddie-Joy Remhild was a consumer & consummate advocate of older people with vision loss in whose honor we are naming this law. She was active in national blindness consumer organizations, and was a founding member of the Alliance on Aging and Vision Loss, the affiliate of the American Council of the Blind for seniors who are blind or have low vision.. Professionally, she was a gerontologist.

By introducing Teddie-Joy’s Law, Congress will both commemorate the legacy of a true champion for the needs and capabilities of all older Americans living with vision loss and articulate a meaningful vision of an America where we truly honor our elders. By enacting Teddie-Joy’s Law, Congress will fundamentally transform our nation’s response to the challenge of aging with vision loss.

## Quick Facts

* At least half of Americans aged 65 and older are at high risk of eye diseases that can lead to impaired sight.
* Of Americans 40 years of age and older, 12+ million report significant difficulty seeing, resulting in reduced ability to engage in necessary daily tasks. Between 2015 - 2050, the number of people 40 years and older who are blind or visually impaired is expected to **double** (Varma, et al, 2016).
* Older people with vision impairment:
  + experience multiple chronic conditions which can cause or exacerbate poor vision,
  + are almost twice as likely to report depression, which can cause social isolation.
  + At least one-third of older people with vision loss also have a hearing impairment ([The Big Data Project - VisionServe Alliance](https://visionservealliance.org/the-big-data-project/)).
* Older people with vision problems are twice as likely to report falls than older people without vision loss (Crews et al, 2014).
* The economic impact of vision loss is estimated at over $145 billion (CDC Fast Facts).
* Far too often, well-meaning, but ill-informed health care professionals consign older people who are with vision loss to exorbitant institutional settings when, with the proper referral and rehabilitation protocols, they could be returned as competent, confident, independent contributors to their communities at much less cost.

## References

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