

Discussion Paper on the Expansion of the OIB Program

Background:

The Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind Program (OIB) provides services to customers aged 55 and older who have significant visual impairment, whose ability to function independently in the home, family, or community is substantially limited due to visual impairment, and for whom the delivery of independent living services will substantially improve their ability to function independently in the home, family, or community.

The OIB program is funded by a formula grant from the U.S. Department of Education Rehabilitation Services Administration. The annual federal allotment is \$2.2M. States must contribute \$1 for each \$9 of Federal grant funding received in cash or in kind, providing a total of approximately \$2.5M in annual program funding.

OIB Currently has 16 full-time OIB Workers, 1 full-time Rehabilitative Assistant, two full-time Program Specialists, and one full-time Manager. In 2021 OIB served 2,098 customers and successfully assisted 748 customers in living more independently in their homes and communities. OIB is on track to serve more customers in SFY 2022; as of June 3, 2022, OIB has served 2,068 customers.

TWC has received over \$20 million annually from the Social Security Administration (SSA) under the Vocational Rehabilitation Reimbursement Program, known as SSAVR. These payments are reimbursements of program costs for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) participants who are SSA beneficiaries if the services provided by the program result in the participant achieving work at a specified earnings level. SSAVR is considered program income to the VR program and may be used to fund VR activities or other programs established by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, including independent living programs. The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) is appropriated \$8.5 million annually for the independent living programs that transferred to HHSC in FY 2017 when the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services was abolished. The remainder is used within the VR program of which \$796,050 is budgeted for OIB FY2022.

Issue:

Although the OIB program is serving more customers each year, OIB funding is not sufficient to assist the growing number of seniors experiencing vision loss who might benefit from OIB services. In 2019, the most recent year for which American Community Survey (ACS) data is available, 118,329 Texans aged 65-74 and 148,191 Texans aged 75 and older reporting vision

difficulty, for a total of 266,520. The OIB program serves individual 55 and older, but ACS data for the 55-64 cohort is included in a larger cohort aged 35-64 so it is not included in this number. Although many seniors experiencing vision difficulty may have the available resources to address their independent living needs, if only 5% of those aged 65+ need OIB services (13,326), the need remains significantly higher than the capacity of the current OIB program.

Decision Point:

Staff are recommending expanding the OIB program in 2023-2025 by using additional SSAVR funds, thereby serving more seniors experiencing vision loss and providing more comprehensive services to enable them to live more independently in their homes and communities.

Funding for the Expansion Proposal	2023	2024	2025
SSAVR Reimbursements	\$4,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$6,000,000
Additional FTE's	7	5	11
Additional Staffing Cost	\$669,074	\$1,078,015	\$2,033,714
Additional Client Services	\$3,330,926	\$3,921,985	\$3,966,286
Total	\$4,000,000	\$5,000,000	\$6,000,000
Estimated Additional Customers Served	734	1,259	2,413

Staffing cost include estimated salaries and benefits. The FTE increases would be absorbed within the agencies existing FTE limit in 2023 and TWC would request an increase to its FTE limit for 2024-2025 in its LAR request.