

LIONS VISION RESEARCH FOUNDATION

HB 941 – INCOME TAX CHECKOFF-LIONS VISION RESEARCH FOUNDATION

TESTIMONY

Chairperson Atterbeary, Vice Chair Washington, and members of the House Ways & Means Committee.

My name is Wayne Cole, Current Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Lions Vision Research Foundation and I am testifying in favor of this bill. The Lions Vision Research Foundation (LVRF) is a private, non profit foundation that secures and manages its own funds. It is governed by a 23 member Board of Trustees elected from the Multiple District 22 Lions membership, plus three Wilmer Faculty. The Board oversees the Foundation's activities and finances, and informs Lions throughout the Multiple District of advances in research and patient care at the Lions Low Vision Center at Wilmer.

Lions from all over Maryland, Delaware, and The District of Columbia began this association with the Wilmer Eye Institute and Johns Hopkins in May of 1988 at the 66th Lions Convention when they voted to formally establish this wonderful foundation. Helen Keller challenged Lions to be her "Knights of the Blind" and it was Helen Keller who suggested to a young researcher by the name of Dr. Arnall Patz that he consider collaborating with the Lions in their efforts to help the blind. As they say, the rest is history.

In March of 1991, Dr. Robert Massof, Director of the Lions Vision Center, recommended that the Center's research be focused on the problem of low vision for which there is no cure. "Low Vision" is vision loss that cannot be corrected by eyeglasses, medicines, or surgery. Major causes of Low Vision are macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, and inherited eye diseases. Five million people in the United States are impacted. The Lions of MD 22 created a \$4 million dollar endowment fund to guarantee the Lions Low Vision Center would operate in perpetuity. It took several years to fully fund this endowment, however, on May 12, 2007 the Lions and their Wilmer partners celebrated the achievement of the \$4million dollar goal. Today, that center is still going strong and we have expanded our scope of services.

In 2009, LVRF established a fellowship program in the Lions Low Vision Center to fund a post doctorate position specializing in low vision. The Lions of MD 22, through various fundraisers, club donations, and individual Lions donations fund this fellowship program in the amount of \$100,000 per year to allow the chosen student to come to Hopkins and Wilmer and study in this field. We have success stories not only at Wilmer but also throughout the world as many of these students have gone on to open their own low vision clinics in very high profile hospitals. In 2018, the Lions Vision Research Foundation Board of Directors voted to fund a \$2.3 million dollar endowment to insure this Lions Low Vision Fellowship program would also operate in perpetuity. We have currently raised approximately \$800,000. Other accomplishments include the Establishment of the Arnall Patz endowment professorship that was established by the combined efforts of MD 22 Lions, Wilmer Residents Association Members, and the Patz family and friends. Through this professorship, the Lions Low Vision Center is enhanced by

increased educational opportunities for specialists and patients alike, better equipment, additional staff, and increased research in the field of low vision.

In 2013 LVRF launched its Low Vision Rehabilitation Network programs with grants from Lions Clubs International Foundation and Readers Digest Partners for Sight Foundation.

Lions are proud of our partnership with Wilmer, but it takes a lot of money to fund these programs, endowments and yet to be identified future projects. Low vision and blindness is not going away. As the last of the baby boomers grow older, like myself, the demand for services increase. Just having this line item on our state tax return so that Maryland citizens could donate to LVRF would be invaluable. We will continue to be Helen Keller's Knights of the Blind and we will not rest so long as there are visually impaired people. We will continue to identify new service opportunities and pursue innovative means of obtaining the funding to support the need. I am asking you to please help us do this. Please support this bill.

Thank you so much for your time and thank you so much for your service and what you do on a daily basis to improve the lives of Marylanders.

Wayne A Cole, Chair Board of Trustees Lions Vision Research Foundation

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