



November 8, 2013

Dear Ms. Hopko:

The California Association of Orientation and Mobility Specialists (CAOMS) is a statewide non-profit organization designed to support the Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Specialist. Established in 1966, CAOMS goals include providing statements of position regarding quality standards, liability and service criteria which may then be used as a means of understanding the role of the O&M Specialist in the rehabilitation and education of visually impaired students.

It has come to our attention that the Los Angeles County Office of Education is considering a district wide decision to not allow the transport of students in personal vehicles. This will seriously impair the professional responsibilities of the O&M Specialists that are employed with your district. More importantly, it directly affects the quality and scope of O&M Services that the blind visually impaired students will receive.

As you know, Orientation and Mobility is a State mandated Designated Instruction and Service (DIS). The California Department of Education has published within their Program Guidelines for Students with Visual Impairments, (1997), a subsection in Chapter Four entitled "The Roles and Responsibilities of the Orientation and Mobility Specialist". Listed clearly is the following: "Transports students to various destinations as necessary to provide meaningful instruction in realistic learning environments". Immediately below: "Is responsible for teaching safe techniques to use at all times in all environments while fostering maximum independence" (p33). This, then, becomes the heart of the debate.

Providing equal access to education for visually impaired students is a fundamental right. The art and science of Orientation and Mobility requires systematic instruction in a variety of settings to teach the student to gain confidence and increase travel independence. The very nature of being visually impaired requires real environment experiences. It is impossible to replicate or simulate much of the O&M curriculum such as intersection crossings, the flow of traffic, or even escalators in classroom or campus settings. The complexities of bus travel with drivers, other passengers, fares, time, and routes would not be feasible or work outside of the actual environment.

Transporting students in a timely manner to complete the lesson objective is imperative as a responsibility of the O&M Specialist. A car provides that timeliness. Bus lessons with high school students take twice as long without the use of a car. Instructors and students are both hampered by this. Students lose important academic time because of lengthier lessons, and instructors see and provide instruction to fewer students on a daily basis. The use of taxis, Para-transit, school buses, or parents driving students to the lesson location are neither time or cost efficient.

Orientation and Mobility Specialists are University trained and receive a Master of Arts Degree in Special Education. O&M Specialists adhere to a stringent code of ethics. As State teachers,

they pass fingerprinting and background checks. Arguably, this is significant in and of itself. The decision to prohibit O&M Specialists from driving students seems to give little worth to the above. It is our argument that instructional decisions need to be made from an educational standpoint by educators, rather than by lawyers or risk management groups from a litigious standpoint. If not, everyone is diminished, and the instruction provided to students is fragmented and limited.

As educators, O&M specialists assess and design specific goals to meet individual needs. These goals require natural settings. A car provides the cost efficiency and timeliness necessary. To accomplish this there are other options besides using the personal vehicle of the O&M instructor. Some school districts provide district owned vehicles for this DIS service. Other districts are satisfied with instructors showing proof of high/business rates of liability and bodily injury. Additional options might be staying within the district boundaries, using district employee drivers with stellar driving records and/or using aides as chaperones.

It is our wish that these points have proved useful, and that you will be open to the discussion of O&M Specialists using vehicles to accomplish their necessary instruction to the blind and visually impaired students in your district. In closing, we would like to cite once more California's Department of Education Guidelines for Students with Visual Impairments where there is also a sub-section on the roles and responsibilities of administrators in Chapter Five. The supervisor of personnel "is knowledgeable about the unique educational needs of students with visual impairments and the roles and responsibilities of the personnel being supervised so that he or she may assist in improving the instruction and services being provided to meet these needs" (p40).

Respectfully,

Lalo Quezada, MA, COMS
President CAOMS
Southern CA Chapter
Long Beach Unified School District