

U.S. Rep. Pocan: Members of Congress introduce the Helen Keller National Center Reauthorization Act

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WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Representatives Mark Pocan (WI-02), Tom Cole (OK-04), and Tom Suozzi (NY-03) today led a bipartisan group of Members of Congress in introducing the “Helen Keller National Center Reauthorization Act,” which would reauthorize Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) for 5 years.

HKNC provides essential rehabilitation and vocational training to the deaf-blind community across the United States. The Helen Keller National Center Reauthorization Act would allow for Congress to continue funding the Center from 2019 through 2023 by means of the Appropriations process.

“For more than 50 years, Helen Keller National Center has provided critical services for deaf-blind Americans across the nation. With plans to expand to more states and regions, the Center will continue its long tradition of supporting those who are deaf-blind and giving them the opportunity to fully participate in their communities,” **said Pocan**. “Since it was first authorized in 1967, Congress has made funding the Center a priority and I look forward to working with my colleagues to ensure that we can continue to support this important organization.”

“I am proud to join my colleagues in introducing legislation that would reauthorize the Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youth and Adults. For more than 50 years, the Center has admirably served deaf-blind communities and also supported those who care for and work with these individuals,” **said Cole**. “Certainly, the Center’s valuable mission, important work and role as a resource is worth affirming

through reauthorization by Congress.”

“The Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults, which is located in my district, is the only place nationwide which serves a population that is both deaf and blind. Imagine deaf and blind together. The Helen Keller National Center truly brings miracles to the families it serves.” **said Suozzi.** “That is why I am so honored to help introduce this bill. We must give them the help they need to strengthen their services and build greater capacity across our country.”

“Helen Keller National Center is very grateful for the bi-partisan support for the re-authorization of the HKNC Act. Established 52 years ago, HKNC is working with many partners across the country to strengthen and build services for and with youth, adults and seniors who are deaf-blind,” **said Susan Ruzenski, Executive Director of Helen Keller National Center.** “The growth and collaboration among state and local partners has leveraged HKNC’s resources and ability to impact the lives of people who are deaf-blind, their family members and the professionals who work to support the deaf-blind community in achieving employment and independent, self-actualized lives. The re-authorization of the HKNC Act validates the importance of our mission and we wholeheartedly renew our commitment to ensuring that each person who is deaf-blind has the opportunity to live, work and thrive in their community of choice.”

Since it was first authorized by Congress in 1967, HKNC has expanded to support regional representatives based in California, Georgia, Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, Texas, Utah, and Washington. It has also created six new deaf-blind specialist positions so far across the country that will provide additional assistance and support to deaf-blind persons in Arizona, Florida, Hawaii, Iowa, Ohio, Texas, and Washington. HKNC’s goal is to deploy 20 deaf-blind specialists (2 in each region) and it is also establishing a Community Service program in Los Angeles/San Diego with the goal of 4 others by 2020.

HKNC is the only comprehensive national program that provides information, referral, support, and training exclusively to youths and adults who have combined vision and hearing loss. The Center also supports the families and professionals who work with the deaf-blind community.

Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) exists to enable people who are deaf-blind to live, work and thrive in the community of their choice. The HKNC Act calls for the Center to:

1. Provide specialized intensive services or any other services, at the Center or anywhere else in the United States, which are necessary to encourage the maximum personal development of any individual who is deaf-blind;
2. Train family members of individuals who are deaf-blind at the Center or anywhere else in the United States, in order to assist family members to provide and obtain appropriate services for the individual who is deaf-blind;
3. Train professionals and allied personnel, at the Center or anywhere else in the United States, to provide services to individuals who are deaf-blind;
4. Conduct applied research, development programs, and demonstrations with respect to communication techniques, teaching methods, aids and devices, and delivery of services; and
5. Develop and maintain a national registry to identify the deaf-blind population and their needs.