

dDear Legislators,

I am writing to you in regards to the removal of the stoplight in the city of Oakes. I am a parent of a young visually impaired child. My daughter has a genetic condition that caused her to permanently lose some of her vision. We know that she has lost some of her peripheral vision. Because of this walking without tripping over objects and noticing objects on either side of her has been challenging. She will more than likely continue to lose more vision which may or may not end in total blindness. I am telling you this because my family has come to rely on this stoplight for several reasons.

Four days a week I walk my daughter from her daycare on Main Street to Oakes Public School to attend Special Education Preschool. We cross the intersection that the stoplight is on during the noon hour, during one of the busiest times at that intersection. Have you ever had to cross a busy intersection, with no stoplight, with a young child(ren) in tow? I have. As a parent not only are you constantly watching the cars in both lanes to ensure the driver has seen you and is stopping, but you are also trying to get the child (ren) across the street safely. This stoplight has ensured that my daughter and I have a safe place to cross, two times a day, four days a week. Without this stop light I feel we would be safer to drive the three blocks to school. As I stated earlier, my daughter has difficulty walking safely due to her vision loss. She walks with a white cane and still requires assistance from an adult to remind her to use her cane correctly and watch out for things in the crossing that she could potentially trip over. This has made us slower in crossing the street than a similar aged peer with no vision loss. After we hit that crossing button and wait for the lights to change, I know that the traffic has stopped and I can focus more on the safety of my child. Without this stoplight I would fear for the safety of my child if she had to cross that intersection at any age. She deserves to feel safe in her own community.

I want you to think about when you cross the street. How do you know that it is safe to cross? Do you look both ways and see that there are no approaching vehicles or that the vehicles have come to a complete stop? I know I do. I also know that my daughter can't fully rely on her vision to safely cross at an intersection, she has to use other senses. As she gets older, she will be trained on how to use her hearing to help her cross the street. Listening to the way cars sound when they slow down or speed up. The only spot in our town where we are guaranteed that traffic will stop is at the stoplight. This is the best spot for her to stand by the intersection and listen to the traffic. If the stop light is removed, I am not sure how effectively we can teach her to cross an intersection.

In closing, I want you to try to envision what it must be like to be visually impaired living in a fully sighted world. Everything is harder. Everything you encounter in life needs some kind of adaptation. Please don't make it even harder for her to cross the street.

Thank you for your consideration in the matter.

Sincerely,

Amanda Geffre