National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut

Board Meeting Minutes

September 12, 2020

Called to order: 11:04 AM

Roll Call:

President: Maryanne Melley

1st Vice-President: Philip Magalnick

2nd Vice-President: Beth Rival

Acting Secretary: Marchele Davis

Treasurer: Nathanael T. Wales

Board Members:

Shonda R. Rosetta

Cheri Duquette

Mary Silverberg

Jim McCollum

Recite of NFB Pledge:

Opening Remarks:

President Maryanne Melley stated that rumors are spreading throughout the affiliate. It is suggested that person(s) do not have the NFB philosophy in their hearts. Rumors only encourages hate destroys reputations etc. It was advised that one should not pay attention to rumors and to get the facts from the affiliate! We should share the sentiments of President: Mark Riccobono, “With love, hope and determination, let’s go build the National Federation of The Blind!”

Discussion: Question from Philip: Is there a board or committee of the Merchants Division? Response from Marry: There are not any members of that division. Philip stated that he would like to make a motion to close that division and liquidate the asset, sending them to the general funds. Beth disagreed. Beth feel that the division should stay opened. Philip, stated that if there are no members, then it’s just a title. Maryanne agreed. Jim stated that it can always be re-opened in the future. Voted to close the account and transfer funds to the general account: Unanimously agreed.

Advisory Board Report: Mary Silverberg

The report was from minutes of the June 18th meeting. The more recent minutes will be presented at the next board meeting in November. The Blind American Equality Day: This is a group that plans activities and raises awareness of the day. In addition, the Veteran’s group also supports in these efforts. With regards to B.E.S.B., It was stated that Ed Owens, who was in charge of the Business Enterprise Program, has retired on July 1st. The appointed new supervisor is: Terrell Samson. Due to Covid-19, 32 locations were closed by the end of March. Only 4 Micro Marts and 1 gift store remains opened. The vending facilities of the 3 state parks were stated to open later in the season. However, it is unknown as to how many and which were opened. The staff has been assisting the vending facility managers to apply for unemployment benefits that were made available by the federal stimulus law. This helps to provide facility managers with vacation coverage up to $1200.00. Due to a decrease in building occupancy, the vending machine income has declined by $40,000.00 this fiscal year. With the retirement of the facility manager, who ran the newsstand at the Department of Labor, Statewide Community of Blind Vendors voted to close the location rather than seek a new manager. Two field representatives were hired by the Business Enterprise Program. Mary Burgard who is affiliated with Voke rehab, says that many have been laid off or furloughed from their jobs. In addition, there has been very few employment opportunities. This was a reminder as to why Brian Sigmon, director of B.E.S.B., is not allowed to act on a lot of the decision-making processes with regards to the executive branch of the government. It is the Advisory Board, SRC and other groups that help to vote and make changes. It was stated that there was much concern and discussion regarding focus training areas. It was noted that the Personal Adjustment Program, has their own curriculum and timeframe. There was a public incumbent session. Few members were there from the NFB. It was reported that Nathanael Wales, stated that there is a need to revise the timeframe regarding an existing and current policy. Beth Rival made a motion and Mary Silverberg seconded to request the B.E.S.B director to work with the State Rehab Council. Furthermore, to develop recommendations to present to the Advisory Board on visions to the policy. And then to present those recommendations at the next meeting at the Advisory Board. After much discussion, from concerned individuals, regarding accessible voting, explanations of efforts were both written and verbal communication had been expressed. Unfortunately, resolutions were unsuccessful! A motion was made by Chairperson, seconded by Beth Rival and approved by all to address the matter of accessible voting.

(Report completed)

Question from Philip: Asking if resolution was issued to the Secretary of State.

Response from Mary: “I believe so.”

Comment from Philip: He stated that the primary concerns of his members, over the past 6 months are: no services and/or the lack of services.

Response from Mary: Mary stated that she understood his frustration. Furthermore, these difficult times are troublesome for everyone.

Comment from Beth: Beth stated that Philip is able to email Brian his concerns.

Comment from Nathanael: Nathanael stated how he had liked the thought of problem solving. In addition, he suggested reaching out to the Louisiana Center for the Blind, and other agencies to see what methods are being used in handling various issues relating to the Covid-19. Then sharing those ideas with B.E.S.B.

Comment from Philip: He felt as though B.E.S.B. was being more represented more so than the blind citizens of CT.

Comment from Maryanne: She is not sure about the government mandates. Furthermore, Maryanne mentioned that Blind Inc. will be speaking at the convention. We can ask them how and what they are doing regarding O+M, then share that information with B.E.S.B. If everyone is wearing masks, there is no excuse not to offer O+M training.

Comment from Beth: Beth stated that she will check with her resources and get back to the board.

Final comments from Jim, Cheri, and Nathanael: Suggested that Blind Inc. be place closer to the top of NFB state agenda.

SRC Committee-Deb Reed:

The vocational rehabilitation policy on personal adjustment was last revised in July 2018. Representing NFB of CT was our president Maryanne Melley, she expressed her concerns on how an extension of services was determined solely on the acquisition of skills. Also, there was concern as to who was making this determination. The State director rather than the vocational rehabilitation supervisor. A motion was made by Gary Allen to have the director draft revisions to be discussed at our next meeting on September 23.

(Reported Completed)

BCAC-Barbara Blejewski:

No Report.

Vehicle Donation-Marilyn Wenzel:

No Report.

Federationist Report: Briana Rigsbee:

Briana stated that she will be taking over the Federationist Publication. In addition, gratitude was expressed to the predecessor, Melissa Carney, and to the board. If anyone desires to place issues or articles, feel free to contact Briana at:

editor.fedct@gmail.com

Phone: (203)751-0199

Birdies for Charity Report: Mary Silverberg

$945 from 20 donors with 15%= $141.75. With all the total funds raised, $1086.75. Mary stated that she is very pleased! It was stated that Joe was the IT tech person and Marchele assisted with the Facebook promotions. Hopefully next year having an email blast, will help to reach more supporters.

Pac Plan Report:

Anne Walsh will give a report at Convention 2020.

New Business:

Presentation from NFB of Colorado: Scott LaBarre had updated the board by way of legal counsel, on the voting situation in CT and what they are doing to address it. Scott had emphasized that CT, at the moment, has an absentee voting system, that is inaccessible to the blind and other voters with disabilities. In addition, he went on to say, due to the pandemic, Governor Lamont and the general assembly took action to make sure that everyone in the state could vote by absentee ballot. The idea is good for others; however, the method does not work for the print disabled. This method interferes with the right to vote privately and independently. The state of Colorado, and many other states, have something called an “Accessible Absentee Ballot Marking System.” In particular a vender called “Democracy Live.” Scott stated that the system is very accessible. A brief description was shared regarding the system. Scott stated that the system is readily achievable and inexpensive. Connecticut has received 5.5 million dollars from the “Corona Virus Relief Act.” These funds are to specifically help out with voting. Scott had given complements to the CT affiliate on their advocacy and dedication towards the implementation of an accessible ballot marking system! It was stated prior to the pandemic, President Riccobono had sent a letter to the secretary of state, Denise Merrill, last September, fighting for the accessible absentee ballot marking system. It said that there is an obligation under the ADA specifically “title 2” to provide an accessible voting platform. However, it was stated that President Riccobono did not get a response. Scott had shared that there had been a lot of communications with NFB members and to the state dignitaries. However, voices were not being heard, ignored and having excuses that were unjustifiable. Scott was appointed to get involved. He stated that he had written letters, he too was ignored. Subsequently, Scott and his team prepared to begin a law suit against the state of CT. Scott stated that they have a great legal team with the support of Disability Rights Connecticut. Scott and his team, finally got a response. A meeting was set for Tuesday, September 15th, in hopes that an agreement is made to implement a system. Scott assured the affiliate that him and his team will take every step possible to achieve accessible voting! Scott had recommended that we, affiliate members, write to the town clerks requesting both an accessible application for absentee voting, in addition to an accessible electronic ballot. If you are a military or an overseas voter, you can request an email with the ballot. However, you have to mark and print then send it back. Maryanne had expressed her gratitude to Scott, President Riccobono, and the affiliate for the hard work and bringing this important and worthy cause to light. A few affiliate members had expressed their gratitude and appreciation to Scott and his phenomenal presentation.

Final remarks from Scott: “That we will make sure that every blind American has the equal right to vote as anybody else!”

(Update completed)

Remarks Maryanne: Meet The Blind Month

Maryanne referenced President Riccobono’s previous release on Meet The Blind Month. Maryanne stated although we are currently living in a virtual world, the chapter presidents need to think about reaching out and educating the public about blindness. There is so much that we need to do! Maryanne had shared her experience from the 4th of July. After Maryanne shared her story, she gave some suggestions as to how and what we can do to educate the public. Some examples were: speak before a college group or other types of groups. Furthermore, informing them of laws around the ADA and the philosophy of the National Federation of the Blind. Maryanne had really emphasized the importance of educating to the sighted public.

Comment from Philip: Philip shared the same sentiments. Then he further said that he had encountered individuals with a lack of training. Philip stated that according to his experiences, the unawareness is getting worse! Philip said that he has offered to educate and inform individuals with respect to disability etiquette and awareness.

Convention Committee Report: Maryanne Melley

We will be voting by phone like we did at the national convention. Once we are given a number, there will be practice voting. Amy Ruell, from MA, will be the national representative for our convention this year. In addition, she will be the one to receive the election results. Enter to win a free convention weekend in 2021.

For $20.00 you could be the lucky winner of free registration and a two-night stay at the hotel where we will be holding our 2021 50th State Convention. Also, there will be a pumpkin contest. Decorate, paint, or carve a pumpkin for a chance to win! First place, $75.00; Second place, $50.00; and third place, $25.00.

On Saturday, we will have great speakers; from 9AM–5PM.

There will be a break from 12:15-1:15PM. Furthermore, there will be breakout sessions for guide dog and student divisions. Maryanne stated, after having a long talk with John Bergman at the National Federation of the Blind, it appears to be super expensive to have merchants and venders. We have to pay for phone service and a couple of other things. However, the costs are not significant. Please remember to pay your dues by the time your registration is sent in or you will not be able to vote on Sunday.

(Update completed)

Discussion:

Maryanne stated that the constitutions says that we have 2 weeks to register. But, due to the system that is being used, all dews must be in by that time. In addition to electronic registration, the paper forms have been mailed out. All registrations will be verified as paid members. Maryanne stated that she will register everyone to vote. Furthermore, the names must be the same on the form as when you vote. Beth had confirmed that registration had to be in by October 2nd. Marchele raised a question regarding to pumpkin contest. Question: Would it be wise to have a list of participants so at the time of the contest it could be managed more competently? Maryanne liked the idea. Therefore, she will put the announcement on the listserv and speak to each chapter rep to send names of those who wish to participate to schedule timing. Nathanael raised a question. Question: Regarding the deadline, is that a hard deadline? Maryanne, stated that there is no flexibility. Philip stated that he had 2 questions and 1 comment: Philip had asked if there should be an amendment or a vote to suspend that portion of the constitution? He further stated that he believes that there should be a special meeting. Secondly: Regarding the function of the nominating committee: Is the nominating committee supposed to go to the chapters to see who are the interested candidates for the upcoming positions? Or is it the president that tells the nominating committee who to nominate? Third: Philip stated how he liked a particular speaker that will be presenting at the convention. Maryanne responded by saying that she didn’t think a special meeting was necessary under these extenuating circumstances regarding the constitution. She stated that President Riccobono had to make changes with respect to the national convention. Secondly, Maryanne reported that having been to “Team building for presidents with President Riccobono.” she was told specifically by him, that the president can choose who he or she wants nominated to build and work with the president for the position and the benefits on the board. However, if someone declines the nomination, then changes will be made. Maryanne went on to say that she will check with President Riccobono if there should be a separate board meeting to vote on a 1-time, not following the fifteen-day rule. Maryanne stated that we should not have to bother President Riccobono with issues that we could handle ourselves! There was discussion on the temporary adjustments of the constitution with regards to the Covid-19. Shonda made a point to the fact that we are not to vote proxy. However, due to the Covid-19 the voting platform has to be of this fashion. Question to Philip, from Maryanne: What wording would you feel comfortable with just for this year with respect to an uncontrollable condition?

Response from Philip: We will talk offline.

Nominating Committee:

Noreen Grice: Head of the nominating committee and who is from the Central CT Chapter. She will announce the nominations on Saturday morning.

Marilyn Wenzel: Southern CT Chapter

Crissy Scimgeour: At Large Chapter

(Reported completed)

Chapter News:

Jim Cronin – At Large Chapter: Jim reported that in June, he had Leslie Prescott a low vision expert. Also, in June, he had Frank Covesco, a Reiki 3rd degree instructor. August, reported having technical difficulties. Carol Hix a physical therapist, will speak in September. Finally, President Maryanne will be on the call in October.

Garry Allen, Hartford Chapter: Reported that in June, he had someone from NFB News line and Chris Radio. July, checked in with members.

Philip Magalnick, South West Chapter: Reported that they continue to have weekly Wednesday, occasionally having speakers. In addition, Instructions for iPhone and iPad were given. In September, they had a meeting. Garry Allen had attended. He had announced his candidacy for president during that time.

Shonda R. Rosetta, Shore Line Chapter: Reported that no meetings were held from June-August. However, will resume in September.

Beth Rival: Beth reported that Josephina, who is from the Waterbury Chapter, had recently discharged from the hospital. She has a heart condition, so she is home resting. Furthermore, her son is battling brain cancer. Beth said that Richard, from the Central Chapter, had had a stroke, he continues to recover in rehab. Prayers and thoughts are with them!

Marchele Davis: Southern Chapter: Marchele reported that in June, Ricky Enger, from the Hadley School for the Blind, enlightened us on the programs and services of the school. In addition, prepared for the national convention, had summer recess. The meeting was to resume on September 13th. Next NFB Board meeting: November 1, 2020

Meeting adjourned: 1:28PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Marchele Davis

National Federation of the Blind of CT Affiliate:

Acting Secretary

Maryanne Melley

President