To all Blind Merchants in Connecticut:

You are invited to be a founding member of the Connecticut Association of Blind Merchants, a division of the National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut (NFBCT). Since 1971, NFBCT has been the organized blind movement in Connecticut, working to achieve equality, opportunity, and security for the blind.

NFBCT strives to effectively support and advocate for all blind people in the Nutmeg State. We already have a student division and a guide dog users division, and we are strong in our work to empower these populations because of these divisions. A division in NFBCT exists to inform the entire organization about the issues in that population within the blind community. We also have the resources of a national organization and our national division, the National Association of Blind Merchants. Our leaders all over the country will be resources to you. Please allow me to give two examples of bills in our state legislature in the spring of 2015.

There was a bill that was going to disrupt the funding models currently used by guide dog schools that would have threatened a system that guide dog users currently enjoy. Some of our members are guide dog users, and our organization is well-informed on guide dog topics. We communicated with our colleagues in all other affiliates of the National Federation of the Blind, and we learned how to argue against the bill. When our members stepped up to the plate, whether to make phone calls, send emails, or talk directly to legislators, we knew the people for whom we were advocating. We had been friends, mentors, and mentees. We had fought alongside them for other causes, and we had celebrated victory together. It was a personal issue when a bill threatened our friends and family members. The bill had tremendous momentum, but we stopped it dead in its tracks. That’s the power of the National Federation of the Blind.

There was also a bill that would take jobs away from blind vendors in state parks and other Department of Energy and Environmental Protection facilities. We fought against this bill, too, but we fought for blind vendors who we did not know. Many of our members were willing to step up, but it wasn’t personal like the guide dog bill. Together with those we did not know who helped us, we were able to slow down this bill to only call for an investigation. We know that the results of this investigation will be used to attempt the same thing very soon, and we want to be ready to defend blind vendors next time. They will have more ammunition; will we?

I hope to be able to welcome you to the National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut family as an active participant and/or leader in the new Connecticut Association of Blind Merchants. I would love to get to know you and work with you to raise the expectations of blind people in the Nutmeg State. Our founding meeting will take place at the NFBCT convention in New London on the afternoon of Saturday, November 7, 2015.

Please reach out to us about this opportunity at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Justin Salisbury, NOMC

Legislative Coordinator

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The National Federation of the Blind knows that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future. Every day, we raise the expectations of blind people, because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and our dreams. You can live the life you want. Blindness is not what holds you back.