Dear Federationists and friends,

As summer starts to heat up, I hope you and yours are enjoying the relaxed pace that often comes with the season. In between preparing for summer vacations, convention activities, or maybe just grilling out in the backyard, I hope you will take a few minutes to catch up on what has been going on in the National Federation of the Blind of Georgia. It has been a few months since I last sent out an update and there is a lot of news to share. Keep reading for some last-minute updates on National Convention, info on our 2018 BELL Academy, exciting news about our 2018 State Convention in October, and other happenings from the last few months. So, grab a nice cool glass of sweet tea or your summer beverage of choice and enjoy this update. For those of you using screen readers, you can use your screen reader commands to navigate by heading to move to particular parts of this update.

Sincerely,

Greg Aikens

President, NFB of Georgia

# NFB National Convention

The 2018 National Convention of the National Federation of the Blind begins just over two weeks from now on July 3 and runs through July 8. For more information about the convention, including the complete convention agenda, visit the [2018 Convention page](https://nfb.org/convention).

I look forward to seeing those of you who will be at convention. If you need any assistance during convention, do not hesitate to call or text me at (404) 444-8661. Dorothy Griffin will also be available at (770) 374-4832.

The Georgia Caucus will be held on Thursday, July 5 from 5:00-6:00 PM in Wekiwa 9. For those of you who have not attended the convention before, the caucus is a time to get together with the entire delegation from Georgia. We would love to see you there. It is also a time to discuss any resolutions of interest or answer any general questions about convention. Please share this info with anyone you know is attending convention from our state.

The NFB of Georgia will be selling T-shirts and baseball caps in the exhibit hall this year. Please sign up to help at our table by contacting Nata Watkins (nwatkins@nfbga.org). Also, The NFB Independence Market is still looking for volunteers during convention. If you are available to help, please contact Jen White at jwhite@nfb.org or by calling the National Office. At (410) 659-9314.

# Braille Enrichment for Learning and Literacy

 The 2018 BELL Academy starts today, June 18 and will run for the next two weeks in Atlanta, GA. Eight elementary aged students will have the opportunity to learn braille while having fun and connecting with blind mentors. One of the excursions this year will be to the airport where the students will have the opportunity to explore a Southwest airplane without any other people in it. Thanks to Jackie Anderson for serving as our BELL coordinator and her committee of volunteers for planning such an excellent program. The BELL Committee members were Hayley Alli, Shelby Ball, Patrice Lewis, Chelsie Page, Gaylon Tootle, Anna Trotman, and Nata Watkins.

 New this year is our BELL-X program for students age 14-21. Four high school students will participate this year in a paid work internship. Students will gain work experience as they support the BELL Academy teachers and volunteers over the next two weeks. In the evenings, students will stay overnight in the dorms at Georgia State where they will plan their own meals, make trips to the grocery store, and learn from blind mentors and instructors through evening seminars. Thanks again to the BELL committee for planning this program and to the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency for making the paid internships possible.

# 2018 NFB of Georgia State Convention in Albany

 In case you missed the announcement that went out last month, the times and dates for our 2018 State Convention have been set. The convention will be held from October 5-7, 2018 in Albany. Be watching your email this week for more announcements about registering for the convention and making your hotel reservations. I look forward to being with all of you again in October!

 I need your help as we plan for convention this year. First, I need your ideas for speakers during General Session and breakout sessions. I had several individuals come up to me with good ideas for speakers after our convention agenda was published last year, but of course, it was too late to implement them. If you have ideas, share them with me now at gaikens@nfbga.org or (404) 444-8661.

Second, I need for you to help us pull off an amazing convention this year. Debbie McDonald from our Southwest Georgia chapter is serving as the convention committee chair this year and is looking for volunteers to help with all aspects of convention. If you are interested in helping plan this year’s convention or in helping at convention, reach out to Debbie at dmcdonald@nfbga.org.

Third, I need you to help us identify sponsors for convention this year. Last year was the first time we looked for convention sponsors and we had good success. We had seven sponsors for a total of $4000. I’m hoping that with your help, we can double those numbers for our convention this year. Every dollar raised in sponsorships is a dollar the affiliate can spend on advocacy and programs, instead of spending it on the cost of convention. Attached to this message are our convention flyer and our sponsor and exhibitor letter. Please contact me with any questions or leads on sponsors for this year’s convention.

# Transition and Mentoring Program

 In April, 11 students from across the state participated in our Spring Toward Success Transition Program for students age 14-21 in Decatur, GA. Students learned about braille in the workplace, technology for travel, Orientation and Mobility, riding public transit, and preparing for going to work. Students were challenged to think differently as they engaged with mentors in several blindness philosophy conversations and had excellent questions about what it is like to be a blind adult. Students also had the opportunity to ride the MARTA bus in to downtown Decatur, check out some of the Bluetooth beacon technology from Foresight Augmented Reality, and enjoy lunch at the Raging Burrito. Again, this event was a great success due to the mentors and volunteers who made it happen. Thanks to Jo Ann Johnson, Patrice Lewis, Jackie Anderson, Nata Watkins, Gaylon Tootle, Stancil Tootle, Aracely Rosillo, Shirley Robinson, Geneva Ellingson, and Jessica Beecham for making this event a success.

 Jo Ann Johnson is coordinating our mentoring activities and is currently seeking mentors and mentees. If you are interested in either, please contact her at jjohnson@nfbga.org or by phone at (678) 451-3975.

# Website Updates

 Recently I have been asked by several chapter members or chapter Presidents why their chapter’s events are not announced on our web page. The simple answer is that the information was not shared with our website administrator so he could add it to the website. If you have updates about events happening in your chapter, please have someone write up a brief announcement or description and send it to Damashe Thomas at dthomas@nfbga.org. If you can save your announcement as an attachment to your email instead of putting it in the body of your message, that will save him time and get your announcement up on the website faster. Also, if you notice that information is missing for your chapter, please send that to Damashe as well.

# Legislative Update

 Many of you will remember that this year we were working to pass a bill to protect the rights of blind parents in Georgia. The bill was introduced into the Georgia House of Representatives as HB-891 by Representative Carl Gilliyard after being approached by our Chatham County chapter. WE had an excellent turnout on Blind Day at the Capitol, including members from across the state. There were several new members from our newest chapter in Augusta present as well. The bill did not make it out of the House before crossover day this year. However, we held a press conference on March 1 with Representative Gilliyard to raise awareness on the issue. If you missed the video from that press conference, you can [watch it here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLVYLNsIqb8&feature=youtu.be). HB-891 also received a hearing before a subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee to set it up for reintroduction next year. Thanks to everyone who worked hard to show up at these meetings in support of the bill and those of you who called your elected officials. We will be gearing up in the next few months with this and other legislative issues, so keep an eye out.

# Affiliate Leadership Seminar

 Many of you may recall that in my last update, we were preparing for an Affiliate Leadership Seminar immediately before Blind Day at the Capitol. Over 40 leaders from across the affiliate were in attendance, including representatives from every chapter and division. Leaders discussed a wide range of topics, including expectations for our leaders, the NFB Code of Conduct, ways leaders can contribute on an affiliate level, and the nuts and bolts of running a chapter. We also spent a good amount of time tackling our priorities of membership development, communication, legislation and advocacy, and fundraising and forming committees around these topics. President Riccobono sent Anil Lewis to help facilitate the training and it was excellent to have him back with us in Georgia, even temporarily. We hope to have more of these trainings in the future. If you are interested in attending, please speak to your chapter President.

Well, if you are still with me, I appreciate it. It is exciting to have so much news to share about what we have been up to in Georgia. Please share this update with anyone who would be interested. As always, if you have any questions or ideas you want to share, I am always eager to hear them.

Have a great summer! I look forward to seeing many of you in Orlando in two weeks and to seeing many more of you in October.

Let’s go build the Federation!

Sincerely,