

01/01/2020

Re.: Proposed Legislation to Advance Rights of Blind Parents

Good morning Representative or Senator:

Attached herewith are the following:

1. The Model Blind Parents’ Rights Bill developed by the National Federation of the Blind
2. A fact sheet documenting the need for legislation to guarantee the civil rights of blind parents in Kansas.

We of the National Federation of the Blind, the oldest and largest grass roots organization of blind persons in America, respectfully request your assistance in advocating for legislation to guarantee the rights of blind parents to raise their own children free of undue intrusion from organizations and individuals who have historically interfered with those rights. As the attached fact sheet documents, blind parents in Kansas and across the entire nation have experienced discriminatory actions by various state actors or private actors acting under color of law when they attempt to raise a child in a peaceable, normal fashion. Such discriminatory conduct occurs in a wide variety of situations such as child custody disputes, state and local child welfare agencies, hospital social workers, and others.

The problem here is that actions such as taking a new born baby or even older children from their rightful parents and placing them in foster care, even on a temporary basis, is predicated on long discredited and outdated misconceptions about the innate normality and capabilities of blind persons. From its inception nearly 80 years ago, the NFB believes and has repeatedly demonstrated that the average blind person with training and opportunity are capable of living a full life and is able to compete on terms of equality with their sighted counterparts. This belief and practice involves the full spectrum of daily life including education, employment, community and civic participation, and parenting.

Let us be absolutely clear in affirming that the state child welfare and family court systems are legally obligated to undertake actions which are in the best interest of the child. While some blind parents may not function as adequate parents, it is often due to issues in addition to or separate from blindness. By the same token, some sighted parents also have great difficulty in raising children to the extent that some kind of outside intervention is required for the child’s protection.

Thus, our goal is not to defend or to condone poor parenting. Rather, we seek only to ensure that decisions by family court judges, state social welfare agencies, adoption agencies, hospitals, etc., be legally barred from taking actions against blind parents on the sole basis of their blindness.

We sincerely hope this correspondence is the beginning of a meaningful dialogue with you and your staff as well as key members of the legislature on this important civil rights matter. Our contact information and web sites are shown below the close and signature block.

Sincerely,

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First vice president / policy director

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