OPPOSITION TO HB3986 – Rep. Kelly Cassidy (Chicago)

Ammends the BLIND VENDORS ACT (2421)

OPPOSED BY:

Illinois Committee of Blind Vendors

Illinois Association of Blind Merchants

Illinois Chief Procurement Office

Illinois Department of Human Services

National Federation of the Blind of Illinois

National Federation of the Blind

National Association of Blind Merchants

* The Illinois Blind Vendor’s Act of 2010 (Public Law 2421) creates meaningful employment opportunities for blind and deaf/blind, small disadvantaged business to operate vending and food services on state property.
* 70% of blind persons are unemployed – US Dept. of Labor
* 20% of our employees are persons with disabilities.
* 20% of our Blind Managers are women.
* 28% of our Blind Managers are people of color or non-native immigrants.
* 3 managers are deaf and blind.
* 68 small mom and pop companies depend on this program in Illinois.
* Median income for a blind manager before taxes is $47,000 (no deduction for vehicles purchases allowed.)
* Blind Managers pay for their own health care and retirement, half cannot afford any.
* 30 Managers live at or below the poverty line.
* Our program trains newly blind persons regardless of age as many of our managers are second career seniors who lose their sight later in life. We also mentor blind youth at the Illinois School for the Visually Impaired who may enter our program.
* HB3986 violates federal law: Blind persons seeking employment through the Illinois Business Enterprise Program for the Blind is FEDERALLY FUNDED and is governed by the federal Randolph-Sheppard Act.
* Department of Human Services opposes HB3986 as it takes jobs from blind, minoritie and women owned businesses. HB3986 creates ZERO new employment opportunities.
* The Chief Procurement Office opposes HB3986. Splitting contracts where blind persons currently or in the future operate is a contractual nightmare. The Blind Vendors Act is very clear on state agency responsibility to offer DHS/BEPB vending/retail MOU’s when contracts come up.
* Federal VR110 money would be lost to the State of Illinois every time a blind person is displaced by an outside company.
* The state of Illinois Department of Human Services maintains strict standards to ensure the uniformity of equipment in prisons, training in the operation of the machines, their maintenance and service. The Department has statewide supervisors in place to monitor Blind Managers and has the authority to replace the manager if the location falls below acceptable standards. The department has ongoing training for the managers who operate the locations to ensure are knowledge on the latest practices and trends for products and the operation of the equipment, as well as technology entering the industry.
* By allowing competition, the various prisons will not be assured of continuing quality of equipment and its timely repair or replacement. Nor will they know if the new operator follows standard acceptable business practices, or is knowledgeable of the newest technology, equipment, or products in the industry.
* Blind persons seeking employment through the Illinois Business Enterprise Program for the Blind are ourselves women, minorities and disabled. We proudly employ well beyond other vending companies in the areas of minorities, women and other persons with disabilities.
* The Illinois Blind Vendors Act (Public Law 2421) in large part mirrors the language from federal Randolph-Sheppard Vending Facilities Program that exists to diminish the 70% unemployed rate of blind persons.
* Competition to the Blind Managers on federal and state property is prohibited and enforced by DHS. The right to first refusal for vending and retail stands are a core part of the state and federal law.
* HB 3986 seeks to take 50% of future opportunities and split our current facilities in half (upon a blind manager vacancy) creating a nightmare for our program, procurement, Illinois state and federal agencies.
* HB 3986 claims to promote competition in our facilities where we are naturally governed by market driven forces pricing. Our products sell for what the market bares just as with other vending companies.
* Blind managers operate at the highest levels of products, service and quality at our vending locations.
* We are partners with the Illinois Automatic Merchandisers Association representing small vending operators in Illinois, both blind and not blind.