The at-large chapter met on Tuesday, February. 13th at 7PM via zoom. The meeting was called to order at 7:03PM. Those in attendance included:

Allen Larkin

Brian Langlois

Debbie Malone

Gannon Olson

Hai Nguyen Ly

Kobena Bonney

Liz Lesperance

Paul Bedard

Rebecca Arrowood

Sandy Burgess

Sengil Inkiala

Shara Winton

Shirley Doris

Stephanie Valdes

We conducted an ice breaker where we briefly introduced ourselves and shared what our theme song would be.

Liz recited the NFB pledge.

Allen put forth a motion to approve the January minutes which Cullen seconded. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Sandy went over the treasurer's report. The new balance after the $1200 deduction for Washington Seminar is $644.48. Hai moved to accept the report which Inky seconded. The treasurer's report was approved unanimously.

As a reminder, 2024 dues should be paid ASAP. Chapter dues are $10 and can be paid via the following methods:

·For PayPal, please go to www.nfbma.org. Payment should be made via the "Donate Now" button at the top. Please note, it is critical to indicate the purpose for the payment in the memo field.

·For Zelle, payment should be sent to the affiliate using the email address treasurer@nfbma.org. Please note, it is critical to indicate the purpose for the payment.

Cullen went over the highlights of the February presidential release. Stephanie shared that the national office is seeking personal stories of triumph and how blind individuals have overcome a variety of struggles. The national office is also looking for members to submit articles to the braille monitor. The NFB is also looking for a new theme song.

Debbie and Allen attended Washington Seminar this year. Our affiliate was able to meet with staff at every office except for one. The packets that were distributed described both our present legislative priorities as well as past business that is still being addressed. Great progress was made with the Websites and Software Applications Accessibility Act. However, the Medical Device Nonvisual Accessibility Act and the Blind Americans Return to Work Act need more support. Debbie urged everyone to please email or call their local representatives and make them aware of our legislative priorities. Debbie emphasized that personal stories help the representatives understand how this legislation will have an impact on our community. Debbie will soon be distributing a template to help in this effort.

It is now time to book your room for the national convention which will run from July 3rd - July 8th in Orlando, FL.

Stephanie Valdes and Ellen Bartel recently attended the NFB BELL Academy training in Baltimore. BELL is an acronym for "Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning". The program aims to teach children that braille can be exciting and encourages them to maintain their braille reading skills. There are many steps needed to implement this program at the state level. We may be able to hold this two-week program at a school in Brighton. The program is non-residential. At this point there are 3 children who are interested in participating. Stephanie is the BELL coordinator and Ellen is the braille instructor. Volunteers are in great need in order to get this program off the ground. Shara shared that she has a list of individuals who have already volunteered to assist with activities. The theme this year is "I Can Lead". The program will include 2 field trips. Shirley suggested the Watertown braille trail which travels along the Charles River as a possible field trip idea. Please contact Shara or Stephanie if you would like to assist.

Debbie shared that the state convention will be March 15th - March 17th in Salem. The convention hotel is now full. The Hampton Inn, which is a 7-minute walk from the Salem Waterfront Hotel, is our overflow hotel. The room rate at the Hampton Inn is $165 per night. There will be a House of Seven Gables tour on Friday starting at 1pm. You need to sign up in advance for this tour. There will be a Salem trolley tour on Sunday. The trolley is full but there is interest for a second trolley. Shara will put an ask out to the list serv. If you have not done so already, please register for the convention. Early bird registration is open through the end of the month. Registering qualifies you for door prizes. Hai put forth a motion to contribute as a chapter $100 towards door prizes. Cullen seconded. The motion was approved unanimously. We will let the door prize committee decide how to split up the funds. Please bring cash to the convention in order to participate in convention activities such as raffles and the live auction. Shara has bravely volunteered to be "arrested" in the days preceding the convention in order to help raise funds. Members are asked to either bid on auction items through the online auction or make a direct donation to the NFB of MA via the online auction site in order to bail Shara out of jail so she can attend the state convention. Our auction site is 32auctions.com/nfbma and will go live the morning of Monday, March 4th. Shara’s bond is set at $1,012 which is half of our overall auction goal of $2,024. Let's all help to free our president!

Debbie would like for our chapter to meet in person during the state convention. She suggested we meet for breakfast Sunday morning at 7:30 to discuss activities and fundraising for the next year. More details to follow. In the meantime, please think of fundraising ideas. Shara stated she would like for the at-large chapter to fund a bus to transport our members to our 2025 state convention in Springfield. This bus could make 4 or 5 stops along the way to pick up members. Hai emphasized utilizing social media to tap into resources for fundraising.

Next month Shara and Debbie will do a 10-minute presentation on how to navigate the Salem Waterfront hotel.

We closed this month's meeting by electing 3 new members:

Rebecca Arrowood (of Beverly)

Gannon Olson (of Salem)

Paul Bedard (of Peabody)

Our next meeting will be Tuesday, March 12th at 7:00PM. Gannon will do the icebreaker. Shara and Debbie will present tips on navigating our convention hotel. Hai will recite the NFB pledge. Liz will summarize the presidential release.

The meeting adjourned at 8:28PM.