The parents' division met on Thursday, May 16th. The meeting began at 6:07PM. The meeting attendees included:

Jennifer Bose

Youme Nguyen Ly

Hai Nguyen Ly

Liz Lesperance

Stephanie Valdes

Stephanie recited the NFB pledge.

Hai took down the April meeting minutes in Liz's absence. Liz put forth a motion to approve the minutes which Youme seconded. The minutes were approved unanimously. We also needed to approve the minutes from our meeting in February. We did not meet in March. Hai motioned to approve the February minutes which was seconded by Youme. The February minutes were unanimously approved.

The parents' division would like to be involved in the upcoming BELL Academy. Stephanie is the coordinator of the program. She shared that the program will be held at St. Mary's Parish in Waltham. The address is 133 School St, Waltham, MA 02451. The age group for the program is 7 - 12 years. At this time, there are 2 children who have signed up. Jen is interested in assisting with the program if time allows. Stephanie shared that they are looking for a photographer/videographer to document each day's activities. This resource can then be distributed to the affiliate. The national office liked the idea of the final day of the academy being an open house and may incorporate this idea into their programs going forward. Stephanie suggested having the parents division get involved with the final day of BELL.

Hai and Jenn inquired about the curriculum for the program. Stephanie shared that the curriculum will be tailored to where the children are currently at. This assessment falls under Ellen's responsibility. Games will be incorporated into the lessons and there will also be related activities such as Storytime, preparing lunches, and recess. The national office is requesting a copy of the schedule for the first day, last day, and a regular day. Hai shared that it would be a good idea for volunteers to receive a timeline of what their expectations are so they can prepare appropriately. Stephanie shared that volunteers would be expected to arrive at 9am and stay until 4pm so there is time to clean the room each day. If you are planning on volunteering for the BELL program, please let Stephanie know by the end of May as background checks are required. Hai expressed a concern about logistics and program management. Hai expressed that everything needs to be documented since this is our first attempt to establish a BELL academy in our state.

Hai inquired if we have been in communication with any individuals from previous states who have successfully held this program. Debbie Stein, Denise Avant, and Patty Chang were all part of the committee in Chicago.

Stephanie noted that there is a BELL announcement on our affiliate Facebook page which she would like us to share. Stephanie cautioned that any posts about BELL must originate from the affiliate Facebook account.

Hai shared the highlights of the presidential release which we all had a chance to review.

Since it has been 2 years since our division's inception it is now time to hold elections for our 5 board positions. Our current slate of officers is as follows:

President, Stephanie P Valdes

Vice President, Hai Nguyen Ly

Secretary/Treasurer, Liz Lesperance

Board Position 1, Jennifer Bose

Board Position 2, Youme Nguyen Ly

We discussed holding elections or maintaining the current slate as we have a limited number of members at this time. Ultimately, we decided to maintain the current slate. Jenn put forth a motion to maintain the slate which Hai seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

This week Justin Salisbury emailed Kyra and Liz to share a legislative update. There was a Health and Human Services ruling on May 9th relative to the Rehab Act's Section 504 as well as programs operated by the federal HHS. The summary of this ruling Lexology is pasted below at the end of this email.

Our next meeting will be Thursday, June 13th.

The meeting adjourned at 7:07PM.

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CHILD WELFARE PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

The final rule discusses the wide range of discriminatory barriers that children, parents, caregivers, foster parents and prospective parents with disabilities may encounter while navigating child welfare systems. These barriers may include failing to provide reasonable modifications, failing to place children in the most integrated setting appropriate for their needs, or stereotypes about whether individuals with disabilities can safely care for a child.

The final rule clarifies that Section 504’s nondiscrimination provisions apply to HHS-funded child welfare programs and activities and should be interpreted to protect all individuals with a disability seeking access to such services, including children, biological or adoptive parents, caregivers, guardians, foster parents or prospective parents.

HHS observes that child welfare agencies and providers are obligated by law to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children in the welfare system; however, the decision of whether a caregiver can provide for a child’s safety and wellbeing should be based on facts applicable to the individual rather than stereotypes about individuals with disabilities. To that end, the final rule clarifies that it does not narrow or limit recipients’ existing and long-standing obligations under other civil rights statutes, including the ADA. Rather, the Section 504 final rule sets forth additional prohibitions specific to child welfare programs and services that are often used to:

- Deny a qualified parent with a disability custody, control or visitation to a child

- Deny a qualified parent with a disability the opportunity to benefit from services provided by a child welfare agency

- Terminate parental rights or legal guardianship of a qualified individual with a disability

- Deny a qualified caregiver, foster parent, companion or prospective parent with a disability the opportunity to participate or benefit from child welfare programs based on discriminatory criteria, including IQ tests or algorithms

- Require children, on the basis of disability, to be placed outside the family home through custody relinquishment, voluntary placement or other forfeiture of parental rights in order to receive necessary services.

HHS observes that this is not an exhaustive list, and all HHS-funded child welfare recipients are prohibited from discriminating on the basis of disability in all of their programs and activities.

Source: https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=1dbada09-587a-457c-aa8d-44fe0e0b095b#:~:text=The%20final%20rule%20clarifies%20that,parents%2C%20caregivers%2C%20guardians%2C%20foster