**June 2025 Board Meeting Minutes**

The NFB of MA Affiliate Board met on Tuesday, June 17th. The meeting was called to order at 7:31PM.

Those in attendance included:

Shara Winton, President

Kyra Sweeney, 1st Vice President

Mika Pyyhkala, 2nd Vice President

Kobena Bonney, Treasurer

Allen Larkin

Basil Maurice

Christopher Suplice

ElizabethAnn Johnson

Ellen Bartelt

Hai Nguyen Ly

Liz Lesperance

Margaret O'Donnell

Mark Paquette

Shirley Doris

Stephanie Valdes

Stephen Yerardi

Theadora Williams

Cullen was unable to attend tonight’s meeting. Liz took down the meeting minutes in Cullen’s absence.

**Roll Call:**

We began by doing a roll call where we shared which weather condition best suits our personality.

**Secretary’s Report:**

Cullen emailed the most recent board meeting minutes. Shirley motioned to accept the secretary's report as written. Margaret seconded the motion. A vote was held and the secretary’s report was approved unanimously.

**Treasurer’s Report:**

Kobena presented the treasurer’s report which was recently emailed out to the board members. Kobena asked Cullen to save the report in the shared Google Drive. The current account balances are as follows:

PayPal: $549.33 (the last transfer was before the state convention);

Cambridge Savings: $34,990.82 (checking account)

CD at Cambridge Savings: $45,387.62;

Bank of America: $20,058.14;

Combined Balance: $90,985.91;

Kobena shared that day-to-day transactions are done with the Bank of America account. Kobena said he is working on some outstanding QuickBooks transactions which should be done by tomorrow. Kobena will speak with Shara about working with an admin assistant to help with some of the treasurer tasks. Mika put forth a motion to accept the treasurer’s report as presented. Shirley seconded the motion. The motion was voted on and approved unanimously.

**Affiliate Admin Assistant:**

Shara shared that the woman hired earlier in the year to assist with our affiliate’s administrative tasks has found another job. She did not begin any work for us. Shara inquired if we wanted to hire another assistant. Mika said it will largely depend on Shara, Kobena, and Shirley who do the majority of the admin work. Margaret recommended we think about it more and decide after the national convention. Shara asked Kobena if he needed help immediately. Kobena said he had everything under control. Kobena said he is in favor of hiring an assistant and recommended determining first how much time will be needed and what the rate would be. Last time a committee consisting of Hai, Jen, and Chris was formed to draft a job description. It was resolved that the committee will communicate via email and decide on the best place to post the job description.

**National Convention:**

Shara confirmed that our affiliate will have a table at the exhibit hall. Shirley has agreed to take care of the logistics. We will be selling the remainder of our t-shirts. Sizes are limited, particularly the larger sizes. Minh offered to package and label the t-shirts with print and braille labels. We will also be selling bags with local products. Kyra is going to get Fig Newtons and baked beans candy. Ellen is getting a product related to Ocean Spray. Inky is looking into Cape Cod potato chips. Shannon looked into marshmallow fluff but hasn't received a response. Additionally, Ellen will be selling raffle tickets for this year’s BELL Academy. Shirley is starting to coordinate shifts at the table. The deadline to contact Shirley with availability is July 1st. The exhibit hall table hours will be Wednesday July 9th from 9-5, Thursday July 10th from 9-5, and Friday July 11th from 5-9. Shara and Kyra agreed to work the table Friday night if any t-shirts are left.

Last year we requested a $25 donation for t-shirts. Shirley proposed selling the t-shirts for $20 this year and to reduce the price to $15 for any shirts remaining on Friday. A vote was held and these prices were approved unanimously. We are also going to sell our bags that we have for $5 or $10 with the goodies included. Kyra said she will purchase goodies out of pocket and either have them shipped to the hotel or bought locally in New Orleans.

**National Funds:**

We discussed our annual donation to the four major national funds – the Kenneth Jernigan Fund, SUN Fund, White Cane Fund, and the Jacobus tenBroek Fund. Theadora shared that the Springfield chapter has given $200 for each fund. This is a total donation of $800. Kyra noted it is a critical time for us to support the national office. The affiliate will send an additional $800 to match what the Springfield chapter has given for a total of $1600 which breaks down to $400 per fund. Basil put forth a motion on behalf of the affiliate which Mika seconded. The motion was voted on and approved unanimously.

**PAC Contribution:**

Shirley has agreed to manage our PAC contribution. The national office encourages people to donate during the national convention. Shara has asked Shirley to help spread the word to encourage people to donate on behalf of our affiliate.

**Improved Communication:**

Shara shared that board officers and leaders need to try and improve communication with each other. Shara encouraged more timely communications and urged everyone to get back to each other within 48 hours. Kyra supported this time frame. Shara added that it is still important to respond promptly even if a task is still being worked on. Additionally, Shara highlighted the importance of sharing when board members and leaders will be out of the state or the country.

**National Convention Affiliate Caucus:**

The MA affiliate caucus will be Thursday, July 10th at 8:00PM at the Oceana Grill. Everyone needs to RSVP to Shara so she can give the restaurant an accurate headcount. The restaurant allows each person to have their own check. Shirley raised a concern about being able to properly conduct business in a restaurant setting. Shara confirmed that we will have our own private room and everyone will be seated at one large table.

**The Museum of the Blind People’s Movement  Meeting**

The national office is holding a museum meeting and is requesting that each affiliate sends a representative. Margaret is not going to the convention but is interested in being our affiliate representative. Kyra will try and attend the meeting in Margaret’s place and can share that Margaret would like to be our museum rep. At the moment it is unclear when this meeting will be held.

**Virtual Registration**

Shara encouraged everyone who is interested in attending the convention virtually to please register. There is a $10 registration fee. The link to register is as follows:

<https://nfb.org/civicrm/event/register?reset=1&id=619>

**Door Prizes:**

Door prizes are needed for the national convention. We will donate two bags with a t-shirt in each. Hai will donate $20 per bag as well. Margaret made a motion to confirm this donation and Kyra seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

**NFB Email Issues:**

The national office has shared that the recent email issues have been resolved. If you continue to experience issues please contact David Andrews at David.Andrews@nfbnet.org

**Affiliate Constitution:**

Kyra and Basil are currently working on updating the constitution. Kyra encouraged anyone else who is interested to please contact her. The revised constitution needs to be approved by the affiliate membership at the next state convention.

**MAPBC Update:**

Hai provided an update on the parents’ division. They have been focusing on increasing membership. Two new parents have recently joined the meetings. The division has also been working to support the BELL Academy. Additionally, our affiliate has signed on as co-sponsors for the active parents’ rights bill which has been taken on by another organization. Shara noted that Ellen is the new secretary/treasurer.

**MABS Update:**

Chris gave an update on the students’ division. The division is trying to increase membership and engagement. A survey was sent out last week to find out whether in-person or virtual meetings are preferred and what topics would be helpful to cover in the meetings. They are also looking into starting an Instagram or LinkedIn page. Additionally, the division is looking to make meaningful updates to their constitution.

**2025 BELL Academy:**

Stephanie shared that the BELL Academy will be August 4th through the 15th in Waltham. It will take place in a learning center that contains two rooms and a small kitchen area to prepare food. There is a picnic area outside and a playground down the street. There are currently 4 students signed up. Two students are from out of state. Stephanie has reached out to the surrounding affiliates to spread the word. The background check form has been sent to those interested in volunteering. Even if you volunteered last year you still need to complete another background check. Precious Perez will be the teacher this year. She is currently working on the curriculum. The BELL flyer is available in both English and Spanish this year.

**Waymo Hearing:**

There will be a hearing on Tuesday, June 24th at the state house in support of bringing the Waymo service to Boston. The meeting will be held in room A2. Shara and Kyra are planning on attending and encourage all others to attend and share how this service could be tremendously beneficial to our community. A static Waymo vehicle will be on display as well. If you cannot attend in person you can testify virtually. The link to register virtually is as follows:

<https://forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=a36UCyb_E0uuHFc8Z1DIiJFw9h9rXQtKrU3N5nJZaZpUOVBGU0g5WFIzQU9KOVQwNDlCOVlCMUZUVi4u&route=shorturl>

You also have the option to submit written testimony. This testimony can be emailed to Siobhán Morrissey at Siobhan.Morrissey@mahouse.gov. Please CC Alexander Chilton Alexander.Chilton@masenate.gov and Shara Winton SharaWinton@gmail.com .

**Legislative Updates:**

Kyra provided updates on our state and federal legislative initiatives. Beginning with our state priorities, Kyra stated that in Massachusetts we want to exemplify what it means to be inclusive. We had an incredibly productive day at the state house on June 4th. We had 9 members attend in-person and managed to secure 22 meetings. We gained 2 co-sponsors for H.1852/S.1164 *An Act prohibiting discrimination against adults with disabilities in Family and Juvenile Court proceedings.* We also gained 3 co-sponsors for H.2066 *An Act to impose fines on transportation network drivers who discriminate against riders with disabilities who use service animals*. This is a wonderful result but our work is not done. We should continue working to get additional support for these bills. Kyra shared that we will hold this event next year and hopefully we will have more members in attendance as there weren’t enough members available for the number of meetings scheduled. Kyra will try and announce this event earlier next year. Shara proposed holding the event on the same day which was the first Wednesday in June.

At the federal level, the NFB has prioritized three bills. These bills are the Access Technology Affordability Act, the Blind Americans Return to Work Act, and the Websites and Software Accessibility Act. Kyra urged everyone to contact their federal representatives and encourage support for these bills. Kyra emphasized pushing the Access Technology Affordability Act as it has been introduced in both the House and Senate (H.R. 3702/S. 1467). This act would provide financial relief to blind people in the form of a $2,000 refundable tax credit distributed over 3 years to help with the financial burden of expensive yet necessary assistive technology. This bill has been analyzed and shown that it will save the government millions of dollars.

**MA Dept. of Agriculture Demand Letter Update:**

Liz got in touch with Al Elia who shared that the MA Department of Agriculture has not responded to our demand letter which was sent 6 weeks ago and should have been responded to 3 weeks ago. They continue to state that they are still reviewing the demand. We will take the next steps if we do not get a response by the time of the national convention.

**Guide Dog Group:**

Since Debbie has moved out of state, we need a new leader for the guide dog group if this group is going to continue. Please contact Shara if you are interested.

**Upcoming Fundraisers:**

The David Ticchi walk will be Sunday, October 5th from 9AM to 1PM. Shara has started putting together the informational letter.

The comedy night at the Giggles Club in Saugus has changed to Thursday, October 16th. We have 150 tickets that we need to sell for this event. Shara encouraged everyone to help sell these tickets. It will be a fun filled night featuring local blind and sighted comedians alike. There will also be a few auction items available for bidding. Please reach out to Shara if you are able to obtain a high-value auction item that would appeal to the general public. The comedy night will end at 9PM.

**Regional Transportation Authority**

Debbie was our liaison for the MBTA’s Regional Transit Authority. Now that Debbie has left the state, we are seeking a new member to represent the NFB at these meetings. Please contact Shara if you are interested.

**2026 State Convention**

Our next state convention will be held from Friday, March 27th to Sunday, March 29th.

**Board Meetings and Transparency:**

Shirley shared that the last Cambridge Chapter meeting got intense relative to the Cambridge chapter treasury. Shirley requested a meeting with Shara, Mika, Kobena, herself and Inky. Kyra indicated she is interested in joining this meeting as well. Shirley would like to hold this meeting after the national convention. Shirley wanted to make the board aware of this meeting.

Shirley thanked Shara and Kyra for making it clear that board meetings are open to all members. Jen added that during the last Cambridge chapter meeting David Ticchi pointed out that board meetings have always been open to all but that it hasn't been clear that that is the case. Shara has sent an email to the list serv with the dates and times of all upcoming board meetings. Brian will add these dates to the website as well.

**Next Board Meeting:**

The next board meeting will be Tuesday, August 19th at 7:30PM.

**Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 9:21PM.