**THE BRAILLE SPECTATOR**

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# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

**Editor's Note: One of the highlights of the NFB of Maryland state convention each year is the presidential report. Hearing the report makes us realize the necessity for continuing our work to ensure that blind people can live the lives they want. If you would like to listen to the audio version, go to http://nfbmd.org/sites/default/files/2015\_Presidential\_Report.mp3**

**Raising Expectations in Maryland: A Report from the President**By: Sharon Maneki

Fellow Federationists:

In the Foreword of our book, *Building the Lives We Want: 75 years of the National Federation of the Blind*, Mary Ellen Jernigan compares the revolution in thinking created by quantum mechanics to the revolution in thinking about blindness created by the National Federation of the Blind. Classical mechanics consists of the work done in physics prior to the 20th century. It is the study of the motion of bodies (including the special case in which bodies remain at rest) in accordance with the general principles first enunciated by Sir Isaac Newton. Classical mechanics is a way of thinking about the deep structure of the physical world. Different conclusions will occur from the various specific rules, but those rules share the same patterns.

Quantum mechanics was born out of the inability of classical mechanics to reconcile classical theory with the observations of experiments involving light and particles. The quantum mechanics revolution arose out of the need to explain and understand these anomalies. It was a major shift in the paradigm of physics.

Just as there was a shift in the paradigm of thinking from classical mechanics to quantum mechanics, there was a similar paradigm shift in the thinking about blindness before and after 1940. The view of blindness before 1940 was based on fear, loss, and tragedy. This way of thinking was based on myths and misconceptions, and emphasized the custodial treatment of blind persons. After 1940, the National Federation of the Blind began to demonstrate the capabilities of blind persons to manage our own affairs, provided that we could acquire the necessary training and were provided with genuine opportunities.

As with most paradigm shifts, this view of blindness was very slow to gain acceptance. In 1963, when Dr. Kenneth Jernigan delivered a speech entitled “Blindness: Handicap or Characteristic” he said,

 “No one is likely to disagree with me if I say that blindness, first of all, is a characteristic. But a great many people will disagree when I go on to say that blindness is only a characteristic. It is nothing more or less than that. It is nothing more special, or more peculiar, or more terrible than that suggests.”

This simple concept was revolutionary because if blindness is merely a characteristic rather than a handicap, then blindness does not in and of itself limit an individual in ways that are more significant than those imposed by the combination of other characteristics that an individual may have. Over the years, we have expanded this concept. Today we know that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future. Every day we raise the expectations of blind people, because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and our dreams.

During the past year, how have we raised expectations in Maryland?

One of the principles that Mrs. Jernigan outlined that created the shift in thinking about blindness is:

“a recognition that lack of access to information is the primary objective problem caused by blindness. Emotionally created, phantom problems are the primary obstacles to solving the objective problems.”

By working together, we took several steps in 2015 to reduce the lack of access to information that blind people face. One of the innovative projects of the NFB Jernigan Institute was the creation of the Center of Excellence in Nonvisual Access to Education, Public Information, and Commerce (CENA). Since government and business in Maryland will benefit directly from this program, we asked for funding from the state of Maryland. In 2014, Governor O’Malley budgeted $250,000 to this endeavor, which the General Assembly kept in its budget. I am pleased to report that Governor Hogan also included $250,000 in his 2016 budget to continue the work of the CENA. The Maryland General Assembly kept that money in the budget as well. We look forward to the great things that the CENA will accomplish, especially its plan to provide access to the over 10 million books in the HathiTrust.

Governor Hogan proposed massive budget cuts for the Maryland Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, beginning in 2016. If these cuts were allowed to occur over the next ten years, as Governor Hogan proposed, MLBPH would have been shut down. Because of our advocacy, the Maryland General Assembly struck this plan from the Budget Reconciliation and Financing Act of 2015.

Working in the General Assembly is a mammoth undertaking that requires many hands. Because of the depth of our organization and the willingness of our members to participate, we were able to attend six committee hearings in one week in the 2015 session. This achievement was especially noteworthy because of the huge snowfall that occurred on March 5. Many thanks to Karen Herstein and Aloma Bouma who went with me to Annapolis a day early to be on-hand for the last two committee hearings of that week. Our presence and testimony were especially noteworthy because many of the persons who were scheduled to testify on other bills did not show up. It is well known that the Maryland General Assembly rarely closes when it is in regular session.

Hearing from blind constituents gives members of the General Assembly a perspective on blindness that they would otherwise not have. For example, during the budget hearings concerning the MLBPH on March 3 and 4, Henry Smith, Sandy and Amy Bishop, and Melissa Lomax told legislators why this library is important to them. As a blind college student, Melissa Lomax described how crucial the MLBPH is to her education. At the time of these hearings, Henry Smith had been blind for only one year. Yet, he was able to eloquently explain the need for books, magazines, and newspapers for blind people. Amy Bishop wowed the legislators by explaining her joy in seeing so many braille books in one place. Amy came to the U.S. just a few years ago from China where braille books are very scarce.

Since the inception of the National Federation of the Blind, our fundamental goal has always been, and remains the full integration of the blind into all aspects of society. Because of our higher expectations, we are no longer satisfied with the second-class status that has been bestowed on us. On the last day of the 2015 session, the Maryland General Assembly passed SB868, a bill regulating how transportation network companies (such as Uber and Lyft) will operate in Maryland. These companies will be regulated by the Maryland Public Service Commission. Because of our advocacy, this bill contains language instructing the Public Service Commission to issue regulations to ensure non-discrimination on the basis of disability and the accessibility of all websites and apps.

The only way to use these services is to order a vehicle by using a website or an app. We cannot be denied access because we are as entitled to the information and use of these services as any other member of society. The regulations promulgated by the commission this month are stronger than they would have been if our voice had not been heard. Since the Public Service Commission plans to impose penalties and fines for various types of misconduct, we informed the Commission that if there were to be penalties for certain violations, we expect penalties to be imposed for discriminatory practices as well. I am pleased to report that the Public Service Commission agreed with us. The Public Service Commission will also require transportation network companies to issue reports regarding the cancellation of rides so that they can determine whether persons with guide dogs are facing discrimination. The Commission will also require reports on the maintenance of the accessibility of apps and websites. The ability to use existing public transportation is essential for our full integration into society.

We will continue to work with the Public Service Commission to obtain strong regulations concerning the portion of the taxi industry that is under its jurisdiction. We also intend to work with the Maryland Transit Administration to ensure that information about planned future upgrades, especially in Baltimore, will be made available to the blind.

State law clearly requires that government information made available to the general public should also be accessible and available to the blind. To date, Maryland has a dismal record in making such information accessible. Maryland also fails to properly accommodate its disabled employees because it purchased a time and attendance payroll system, and uses email programs and websites, all with limited accessibility. Creating separate systems for the exclusive use of blind people is not an acceptable solution to these problems. The concept of “separate but equal” was rejected over sixty years ago. We are working directly with the Maryland Department of Information Technology with the hope of rectifying the lack of access to information faced by blind citizens as well as the complete disregard of the needs of blind employees.

Due to advances in technology, blind Maryland voters were able to vote independently and secretly for the first time in 2002. Although Maryland law specifically prohibits the use of a segregated ballot by persons with disabilities, this may happen in 2016. Since Maryland does not have enough of the new electronic voting machines, some voters will have to resort to marking their paper ballots with pencils. By necessity, blind voters can only use electronic voting machines if we are to cast our votes independently and secretly. If all of the blind voters use the electronic machines and all of the sighted voters use paper and pencil, the ballots of blind voters will be segregated and public. Although the primary election is only five months away, the State Board of Elections has not yet developed procedures to avoid the problem of casting segregated ballots. We do not intend to lose the ability to vote in secret.

One of the greatest barriers to full integration is the lack of opportunities in education and employment. Many blind students, especially those with partial vision, are not provided with the opportunity to learn the techniques and advantages of using a long white cane to travel independently. This year, we sought a legislative remedy to solve this problem with the introduction of HB535. In the committee hearings we heard compelling testimony from Dezman Jackson, Fatoumata Boiro, Virginia Anderson and Melissa Riccobono as to why blind and visually impaired children need more orientation and mobility instruction. As a blind mobility instructor, Dezman explained the importance of giving children the opportunity to acquire these skills at an early age. Fatoumata explained the hardships she faced because she never received mobility instruction at school. Virginia and Melissa, two parents with visually impaired daughters, gave their perspective on this very important issue.

The Maryland General Assembly passed HB535, and Governor Hogan signed this bill into law on May 12, 2015. This law requires school districts to regularly notify parents of the existence of orientation and mobility services. The law also states that there is a presumption that all blind or visually impaired students will receive this instruction unless after an evaluation, the IEP team determines that orientation and mobility instruction is not appropriate. We will be working with the Maryland State Department of Education to ensure that there will be strong guidelines to implement this law. We will not rest until every child has access to high-quality orientation and mobility instruction. The ability to use a long white cane is essential.

Blind Industries and Services of Maryland is the largest employer of blind persons in Maryland. The Maryland General Assembly considered a bill, HB349, awarding a larger proportion of state procurement contracts to the Minority Business Enterprise Program. We joined with BISM to protect the jobs of blind Marylanders, especially those who work in BISM’s Baltimore plant. Although HB349 was passed by the Maryland General Assembly, it was amended to study BISM’s impact on the Minority Business Enterprise Program. The Maryland General Assembly also struck language that would have prevented BISM from bidding on janitorial product contracts. However, this law, as we were able to amend it, is only a temporary solution. Protecting the livelihoods of blind persons remains one of our highest priorities.

Throughout our history we have struggled to achieve equal pay for equal work. We have demonstrated our commitment to this principle by leading the charge to enact federal legislation such as the Transitioning to Meaningful and Integrated Employment Act, better known as the TIME Act. There are currently plans by various vested parties to enact legislation to eliminate the practice of paying disabled persons subminimum wages in Maryland. We will monitor these efforts with great interest, and will support this effort if the resulting legislation truly eliminates this unfair, immoral and discriminatory practice.

We continue to help individuals get the services they need so that everyone can live the lives they want. We advocate for better services from the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS). We help parents with their child’s IEP’s, we help individuals with social security issues. In September, Clarence Hennigan, Dezman and I conducted a training session on blindness for workers in the homeless shelters of Baltimore City. We did this because a blind man had been turned away from not one, but three shelters, because the shelters incorrectly believed that they could not help him because he is blind. Solving individual problems gives us the knowledge and experience to continue to make systemic changes.

A second guiding principle outlined by Mrs. Jernigan, in addition to the lack of information, is a “recognition that blind individuals’ notions about blindness have been formed in the general milieu of society, and that gentle guidance and support are necessary to reverse the damage.”

During the past year, by strengthening our local chapters, we worked to correct the myths and misconceptions about blindness held by blind people themselves. Through monthly conference calls, chapter presidents and members of the NFBMD board of directors shared strategies and ideas on how to spread our message of hope to more blind people. We conducted membership outreach events throughout the state. Our most successful event led to the birth of our new Greater Carroll County chapter which will receive its charter of affiliation tonight at the banquet. Thanks to the leadership of Janice Toothman, we held a very successful seminar for blind persons who are also deaf or hard of hearing and we plan to do more. We had a large presence at the Foundation Fighting Blindness annual national conference. Aloma, Cheryl, Dezman, Ebony and Eileen manned our exhibit table. Anil and Maurice conducted workshops there. Ellen and Ken Ringlein were part of a panel of Federation couples who discussed how they live the life they want. Yesterday at this convention, we began an NFBMD diabetic action network committee so that diabetics who are blind or have low vision will be able to maintain independence while managing their diabetes. We continued to enhance our presence on the web, on Facebook and in other social media. We must continue to take advantage of these new opportunities to spread the truth about blindness.

Bringing our message of hope to children and parents ranks among our highest priorities. This year we were able to expand our NFB Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning, better known as BELL, program in two ways. First, we were able to offer a BELL program in Salisbury for the first time. We were pleased to partner with BISM to make that program possible. Seven students and their families, many of whom are at this convention, learned about the NFB for the first time. Parents also gained a new understanding and raised their expectations for their children.

The second way that we were able to expand our BELL program was the creation of BELL X. This program was for older students who had mastered the skills traditionally taught in BELL. For these students, we concentrated more on technology and independent living skills. Many of these students demonstrated their braille fluency skills last night in the performance of the "Braille Apocalypse."

All of these programs cost money. Thanks to Latonya Phipps and her committee we had a new fundraiser this year. The gospel concert for the benefit of NFBMD youth programs was a tremendous success. We are so grateful to everyone who made our traditional fundraisers (basket bingo, the crab feast, and the Bid for Opportunity) great successes. It is a struggle to pay for the BELL programs and the youth stipend programs, but it is a struggle that we must pursue.

When I ceased to be your president in 2006, I did not expect another opportunity to come to give you another affiliate report. I am humbled by the experience to report our successes to you once again. The list of individuals that I should thank is too long to mention in this report, but please know that I recognize and appreciate your efforts. I am filled with hope that we will reach our goal of full integration into society on the basis of equality. We are successful because of our synergy and love for each other. We have learned that no one makes it on his or her own. No blind person is fully free until all are free. Let us live by the words in the following song so that we can continue to make quantum leaps forward in changing what it means to be blind.

"Strive," the fifteenth song on the new NFB CD, was then played.

## JUNIOR LEADERS

Editor's Note: One of the strengths of the NFB is our ongoing philosophy of teaching blind kids at an early age the importance of advocacy, independence, and understanding our message. We look forward to hearing more from our NFBJRL leaders.

### NFB Junior Leaders (NFBJRL)

 By Melissa Lomax

The youngest group of NFB leaders was selected for the NFBJRL board on Sunday, November 15, 2015. This group is charged with helping other blind kids become connected with NFB, coming up with fundraisers and service projects, and learning the fundamentals of leadership. To capture all of their important moments and messages, NFBJRL also has a YouTube Specialist.

Meet the JRL board!

President: Derrick Day, 4th grade

Vice President: Alexis McFail, 4th grade

Secretary: Sujan Dhakal, 5th grade

Treasurer: Feven Geleta, 6th Grade

Board Member: Brandon Pickrel, 8th grade

YouTube Specialist: Naudia Graham, 4th grade

The Maryland Parents of Blind Children came up with the idea of NFBJRL. Theresa Graham and Christine Day helped to plan activities and trainings for the board at the 2015 state convention. Melissa Lomax, along with several volunteers from Blind Industries and Services of Maryland, helped to share communication tips, explain leadership roles, develop speeches, and more. A panel of judges then listened to the recordings and selected the first JRL board.

NFBJRL is currently making foam placemats for kids in domestic violence shelters. To donate to this project, please contact Melissa Lomax at MelissaLomax1@gmail.com and your message will be passed along to the JRL President.

## Employment Panel

By Judy Rasmussen

We Can Meet The Challenge Of Maintaining Employment Through The Love, Hope, and Determination of the National Federation of the Blind.

Although we have laws to prevent discrimination, technology to improve accessibility, and increased awareness of the capabilities of people with disabilities by employers, there are still many barriers to overcome by blind people before we can truly compete on terms of equality. This article is written summarizing presentations made by employment panel participants at our 2015 state convention. Their struggles are still ongoing. We have a long way to go before the barriers are broken down and we have achieved equality.

**Yasmin Reyazuddin**, Information and Referral Aid 2, Aging and Disability Services, Rockville, Maryland said:

"I joined the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland in 1992 and the workforce in 2000. I am currently employed by Montgomery County. I began as a public intern and was later awarded full employment status."

In 2009, the county decided that it would be more efficient to put all of the information and referral specialists into a call center. While Yasmin was excited about this, she had many concerns about whether the call center would be accessible in terms of screen reading technology, so she could continue doing her job. To Yasmin's great disappointment, the county advised her that it would be too expensive to make the call center accessible for her to use.

For the past six years, Yasmin has remained in the Aging and Disability Services Department. Since she has been given little to do, she often feels frustrated and quite bored. She knows she has far greater potential to help people and is eager to be placed in a position where she can use her skills. Yasmin did not take the matter lying down. With the Federation's help, she has sued Montgomery County. More about Yasmin's ongoing situation will be presented in another article.

**Beth Fogle-Hatch** , System Engineer, Us Department of Defense, Baltimore Maryland, shared her story of how difficult it was to obtain accommodations to take the Certified Information Security Systems Professional Exam. This exam was required for her job. Beth proposed that she be allowed to take the exam using the JAWS screen reading software which she uses every day. Beth was dealing with two issues in trying to obtain the accommodation. First, there was the company who administered the test, Pearson View, who would not communicate with her, and kept delaying her request for the accommodation. She discovered that it wasn't only the actual test which needed to be accessible, it was also the data creating the test that had to be accessible. Though her accommodations were approved after a year, the people who created the exam, and Pearson View, who administered the exam, still did not understand what a screen reader was. Everyone's idea of an accommodation was that even though JAWS would be on the computer, someone else would have to record her answers into a second computer. Beth said her employer was very understanding through the whole process, and were just as frustrated as she was, since they observed her using JAWS every day to perform the essential functions of her job.

After over 150 e-mails and many phone calls, Beth had reached her limit. She contacted the "Cavalry", the National Federation of the Blind legal team. Because of the efforts of the National Federation of the Blind, Beth took the test with the accommodations she needed, and Beth hopes to take this test in the near future.

**Alfred D'Agostino**, Ph.D., Professor of Chemistry, Notre Dame of Maryland University, Baltimore, shared the painful story of attitudinal barriers and outright discrimination as he continued to perform his professorial duties.

Dr. D'Agostino was born with poor vision, but he didn't let that stop him from achieving his dream of becoming a chemistry professor. By 2011, he had worked at Notre Dame University for 17 years. He had become a full professor, had achieved tenure, and had served as chair of the chemistry department for 15 years. He had also served as chair of the biology department for two years.

In March 2011, the dean came to Dr. D'Agostino and told him that his contract would not be renewed unless a medical doctor signed off on a list of approximately 15 items. Some of the items included: whether he could interact with students in the classroom, whether he could use technology, whether he could grade papers, and whether he could put comments on papers. Before this demand was made, he had been successfully doing all of these things.

Dr. D'Agostino felt quite frustrated and overwhelmed by what he was being asked to do. He had not been a member of the National Federation of the Blind previously. However, he knew he needed help, so he contacted the NFB legal team.

For over a year, the battle ensued between the NFB and Notre Dame University. During that time, he had to teach a mock lab, be evaluated by an "expert" and a host of other things that he had already been doing for many years.

After a year, he received his renewal contract. However, he feels much damage has been done to his reputation, and that he is still being asked to demonstrate his capabilities much more than other professors.

Through this experience, Dr. D'Agostino has become aware of some of the issues blind students are facing. He plans to institute a program for elementary school blind students to participate in chemistry experiments. He is also educating professors and others on his own campus about the capabilities of the blind, and has submitted a manuscript to the *Journal of Post Secondary Education and Disability*, describing how science labs can be made accessible.

**Kehinde Dawodu**, Environmental Engineer, Department of Energy and Environment, District of Columbia government.

Kehinde has been employed as an environmental engineer for 15 years. His job was to review site plans submitted by anyone who wanted to build a structure that may cause land disturbance. Kehinde knew he had a progressive eye condition, but wanted to stay at his job as long as he could. For a while, he was able to read the computer screen using ZoomText. However, in 2013 he lost all of his remaining vision. His employer was determined to ask him to leave since they felt he could no longer perform his job duties. Kehinde felt quite differently about it. His office did provide him with the JAWS screen reading software, but offered no training. Kehinde was supposed to respond to a performance improvement plan (the precursor to being terminated) at the same time he was learning to use JAWS.

Kehinde found the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland. He was provided with an attorney who filed a complaint with the EEO Office of the District of Columbia. The EEO Office agreed that he should not be terminated. Kehinde was provided with JAWS training, and is doing 95% of his job. One issue still on the table is whether his employer will be required to provide him with a human reader to review drawings and blueprints. Kehinde has learned to do his job in a different way, but is still getting it done.

We are proud that the NFB of Maryland was able to step in and help each of these panelists. Their determination not to give up, even when things looked bleak, is a testimony to their courage and our staying power. We will most likely be writing future *Spectator* articles to bring people up-to-date as these panelists continue struggling to overcome the barriers they face to live the lives they want.

**Maryland Moves to Eliminate Subminimum Wages for Workers with Disabilities**

By Sharon Maneki

One of our issues for the 2016 session of the Maryland General Assembly was to work with other disability groups on eliminating subminimum wages in Maryland for workers with disabilities. The National Federation of the Blind of Maryland joined a coalition of disability groups led by People On the Go to work to enact this legislation. Delegate Jeff Waldstreicher sponsored HB 420. Many thanks to the following Delegates who also co-sponsored the bill: Aumann, D. Barnes, Barve, Beidle, Bromwell, Brooks, Carey, Carr, Clippinger, Cullison, Davis, Ebersole, Fraser–Hidalgo, Frick, Frush, Gilchrist, Hammen, Hixson, Holmes, Impallaria, Lierman, Luedtke, McKay, A. Miller, Morales, Patterson, Pendergrass, Platt, Sanchez, Simonaire, Smith, Vaughn, M. Washington, West, C. Wilson, Wivell, and Zucker. Senator Dolores Kelly sponsored SB 417. Many thanks to the following Senators who also co-sponsored the bill: Astle, Benson, Guzzone, Jennings, Klausmeier, Peters, Pugh, Reilly, and Young.

The National Federation of the Blind has been fighting to eliminate the unfair, immoral, and discriminatory practice of paying workers with disabilities less than the minimum wage for many decades. The following article, taken from the February 12 edition of the *Washington Post*, outlines this issue from both the employee and employer perspective:

**Disabled people are allowed to work for pennies per hour —
but maybe not for much longer**

The era of the "sheltered workshop" is on the way out.

By: Lydia DePillis, February 12

Most factory production disappeared long ago from the warehouses on the outskirts of Baltimore. There is at least one remaining, however — and it’s a little different than what you might imagine.

At the Chimes, a no-frills building with lofty ceilings and little heavy equipment, hundreds of workers are relaxed and smiling, sometimes approaching visitors to say hello and introduce themselves. The tasks at hand seem more like group art projects than assembly lines, with people chatting amiably while placing bottles of beer into six-pack cartons, or cutting up drop cloths for use by cabinetmakers. Some are cleaning up from breakfast in a bright cafeteria, while others help prepare lunch at the building’s industrial-size kitchen.

Here’s the difference between the Chimes and your typical manufacturing facility: The workers there have a broad range of physical and mental impairments, from cerebral palsy to autism to Down’s syndrome. The non-profit takes on contracts for low-skilled manual labor, paying some program participants less than minimum wage under an exemption from federal labor law for employment of people with disabilities.

How little do participants make? Rates may go as low as less than a dollar per hour, according to individual measurements of a person’s productivity, on the philosophy that it’s better for those who couldn’t get a job on the open market to work and earn even a token paycheck. In Maryland, workers in these types of jobs make $66 on average every two weeks for 17 hours of work. Chimes works with about 2,000 people, 25 percent of whom are paid less than minimum wage. It received $2.7 million in state and federal funding to support just the 240 people who work in the Baltimore facility, along with income from the contracts it fulfills.

According to the Department of Labor, 228,600 disabled people across the country work in what’s known as “sheltered” employment; disability advocates estimate that number may be on the low side due to under-reporting. But the practice has fallen increasingly out of favor in policy circles, and it could soon end entirely in Maryland: A bill is advancing through the state legislature that would phase out the practice by 2019.

Chimes’ CEO, Marty Lampner, thinks that’s way too hasty a move in isolation. “We don’t have the alternatives that are suggested are out there,” Lampner says. "I don’t think you can just slam the door and tell people to go elsewhere, or that the market will pick them up.”

For years now, disability rights organizations have opposed that line of Chimes’ business on the grounds that it creates low expectations for people who should be able to hold traditional jobs at competitive wages. In the past, most notably in the case of Henry’s Turkeys, sheltered workshops have been faulted for exploiting the low-cost labor the exemption enables without providing the services it also requires.

“There are lots of strategies out there to assist with individuals with disabilities,” says Rose Sloan, government affairs specialist with the National Federation of the Blind. “With the proper training and support, I don’t care what disability they have, they can do a job that’s worth at least the minimum wage.”

Until recently, those advocates hadn’t made much headway. A bill that would wipe out the sub-minimum wage exemption was introduced in 2013 and hasn’t gone far; a wave of media attention to the issue was short-lived. About 3,400 organizations hold the certificates, and their lobbying organization — ACCSES — has fought to preserve the status quo. One of the nation's largest employers of disabled people, Goodwill Industries International, has been particularly influential in persuading lawmakers that the exemption is the only way to provide work opportunities to disabled adults.

 “Eliminating or phasing out the special minimum wage would likely result in many individuals with significant disabilities receiving no wages instead of earning special minimum wages,” reads a 2013 Goodwill position paper on the issue. "Furthermore, they would be denied the tangible and intangible benefits of work: independence, participation, dignity, self-esteem and sense of accomplishment, among others."

Nevertheless, defenders of the practice are now losing on a host of fronts.

A non-exhaustive list: In 2014, Congress passed a new workforce investment law that places a number of restrictions on the use of sub-minimum wages, requiring that disabled people be counseled about their vocational options before being referred to a sheltered workshop. The law also called for a committee to make recommendations on the future of the program, and the resulting report recommended that it be phased out entirely, which the federal National Council on Disability had already endorsed. Meanwhile, Secretary of Labor Tom Perez has stated his opposition to the sub-minimum wage exemption, and last year New Hampshire became the first state to ban the practice.

“The providers that want to maintain the status quo are fighting particularly hard right now, because they’re trying to defend a dying industry, but the tide has really turned in the last two years on this issue,” says Allison Wohl, director of the Association for People Supporting Employment First, which argues that disability service providers should adapt to support people in jobs on the open market rather than concentrating them all in one place. “The way that systems are funded, and the way that funds are distributed, is just not going to hold up in the future."

In hearings at the Maryland legislature this week, disabled people and their guardians argued passionately for the exemption to be phased out. Some disability services providers agreed, saying they had already managed to transition all of their clients to regular jobs in the community. Their trade association, the Maryland Association of Community Services, argued for a longer time frame and higher reimbursement rates for what could be a more expensive model of supporting the most impaired people.

Lampner, of Chimes, is more troubled by the Maryland bill. He doesn’t think that everyone can win competitive work, pointing to the high rate of unemployment among people with much more mild disabilities than the people he serves; he says the market could never absorb all of them. Out of its several hundred charges at any one time, Chimes is able to place around five per month in the open job market. And there’s merit, he says, in allowing people to experience higher-skilled professions in which they might never be fully productive.

“We are obliged to be competitive in the marketplace to get the work,” Lampner says. "And if I don’t pay 14(c), I need to bring in a different class of jobs that are going to be less skilled. One of the reasons I think 14(c) has value is that not everybody wants to be a janitor or a stocker.”

Still, Lampner says he recognizes that times are changing, and is trying out new business models that might fit with where policy is headed. For example, over the past few months he’s created space in the cavernous Baltimore warehouse for internet retailers to locate their entire operations, in exchange for putting disabled people to work.

One of the first pilots is with a company called Cyberspa, which sells kits that rejuvenate the hard drives of aging PCs. It’s starting to sell directly through Amazon, and expects that a team of five to ten Chimes employees could assemble and package 25,000 kits per month. With a sticker price of $99 each, that would even allow the workers to be paid the full minimum wage, even if they couldn’t move as fast as someone without a disability.

“Ten years ago, to launch this product, we would have contracted offshore,” Cyberspa's CEO, Allen Shay says. "Have someone do this in China and ship them over in big boxes and that would be that.” But remote production is a little riskier these days, Shay says, with the risk of intellectual property theft. A partnership with Chimes made keeping those jobs in Baltimore possible.

So far, it’s worked out for Gary Ragins, 24, who’s confined to a wheelchair with cerebral palsy. He’s been at Chimes for two and a half years, and had worked for a while at TJ Maxx, but took a liking to the part of the job with Cyberspa that involved working with computers. The idea of learning more about technology, Ragins says, made him finally abandon his dream of going to Hollywood to become an actor. “Right off the bat, I really got attracted,” he says.

Lampner — who made $453,000 in total compensation in 2013 — says his goal is for the businesses to employ fully-abled people as well, to provide something more like an integrated experience. Down the road, he figures Cyberspa might get big enough to move into its own facility and take the disabled workers along. Meanwhile, the revenue from Cyberspa’s operations could finance improvements to the building, like a mezzanine level to put more workshop space.

“It’s a *not-for-profit*. It’s not a non-profit,” Lampner says, explaining his attitude towards earning money.

*\*Correction: A previous version of this article said that Goodwill Industries is a member of ACCSES. It is not.*

(Editor’s note: Chimes eventually changed its position and supported this legislation).

To compliment this article from the *Washington Post,* I’m including the written testimonies that Federation members, Leah Palmer and Greg Miller, presented before the House and Senate committees hearing the minimum wage bill. Here is Leah Palmer’s testimony:

My name is Leah Palmer, and I came here to ask you to vote in favor of HB 420 so that disabled workers like me can get a job with a decent paycheck.

Because I am blind and have other disabilities, many people think that I cannot do anything. When I was in school, educators said I could not get a high school diploma. My family and the NFB got me the chance to get into a diploma program, and I graduated from Crossland High School in Temple Hills in 2013. I am very happy to have my high school diploma, even though lots of people said I could not get it.

In 2014, I attended a program operated by Southern Maryland Vocational Industries (SMVI). I thought that this program would provide job training and work experience. Instead, all I did was go on trips to the movies, the mall, and the supermarket. I had to leave that program because I was not learning anything. Once again, people did not think that I could learn. I was able to leave in September 2015.

Baltimore Arc accepted me into Project Search. I have an internship at Union Memorial Hospital. I am learning lots of things, and I really like all the jobs that I do. I answer the phone and take messages. I work in the film library, mailing out CDs and papers for the patients. I digitize CDs and other films and move images into the right computer file. I also make copies and do filing.

When the internship is over, I hope that I get a job with a paycheck so that I can get my own apartment. I want to go to work and come home like everybody else does. I do not want to be stuck in a workshop because I know I can do better. Please help all the young people by giving us a chance to work in the community. Vote yes for HB 420.

Here is Greg Miller’s testimony:

My name is Greg Miller, and I came to ask you to vote in favor of SB 417 so that disabled workers like me can get a job with a decent paycheck.

I have had several jobs in my life. My favorite job was at Dave and Busters at White Flint Mall in Kensington, Maryland. My job was to roll silverware into napkins so that the customers had what they needed when they were ready to eat. I was a very good worker. The staff liked me, and I got along well with everyone. This was the best job because I made $7.50 an hour.

I worked at Dave and Busters from November 2007 to August 2014. I lost the job when the company moved from White Flint Mall to Arundel Mills Mall. I could not get to Arundel Mills Mall on time using public transportation.

I am very independent. I live by myself. I cook and clean and travel. I need a good paying job so that I can remain independent. If Dave and Busters moves back to Montgomery County, I will try to work there again.

Please vote yes for this bill so that I can get a job and keep my independence.

The Maryland General assembly passed the Minimum Wage and Community Integration Act. We must now take measures to ensure that Governor Hogan signs this bill. The basic provisions of the bill are:

**Preamble:**

WHEREAS, Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 authorizes the United States Secretary of Labor to grant special wage certificates to certain entities, which may then pay special minimum wages less than the federal minimum wage to workers who have disabilities; and

WHEREAS, These Section 14(c) certificates also allow the payment of wages that are less than the prevailing wage to workers who have disabilities for work being performed on contracts subject to the McNamara–O’Hara Service Contract Act and the Walsh–Healey Public Contracts Act; and

WHEREAS, During 2015, 3,589 Maryland residents were employed under Section 14(c) certificates; and

WHEREAS, 20% of individuals with developmental disabilities in Maryland work in facility–based settings where, for a 2–week period, the mean number of hours worked is 17 hours and the mean income is $66; and

WHEREAS, The practice of paying workers with disabilities less than the federal minimum wage dates back to the 1930s, a time of virtually no employment opportunities for disabled workers in the mainstream workforce; and

WHEREAS, Advancements in vocational rehabilitation, technology, and training now provide workers with disabilities with greater opportunities; and

WHEREAS, Employees with disabilities have rarely been able to transition from Section 14(c) programs to obtain integrated employment at competitive wages; now, therefore,

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,

That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

Beginning October 1, 2020, the administration may not fund providers that pay individuals less than the minimum wage under a certificate that the United States Department of Labor issues to a work activities center or other sheltered workshop to allow the work activities center or workshop to pay an individual less than the wage otherwise required for the individual under federal law.

The Administration and the Department of Disabilities, in partnership with relevant state agencies, including the Department of Economic Competitiveness and Commerce, the State Department of Education, and the Division of Rehabilitation Services, shall develop and implement a plan to phase out on or before October 1, 2020, authorizations under § 3–414 of the Labor and Employment Article to pay an employee with a disability less than the minimum wage otherwise required for the employee under title 3, subtitle 4 of the Labor and Employment Article.

Beginning October 1, 2020, the Commissioner of Labor and Industry may not authorize a work activities center or other sheltered workshop to pay an employee with a disability less than the minimum wage [under paragraph (1) of this subsection if the work activities center or workshop was not authorized to do so before October 1, 2016].”

Other sections of this bill describe protections for the severely disabled, such as what each individual’s habilitation plan must contain; what data must be tracked about employment outcomes, volunteer activities, etc.; and requiring reports on benchmarks and other information that must be issued to the Governor and the General Assembly during the phase-out period. The bill also requires the Department of Disabilities and the Developmental Disabilities Administration to conduct a study on employees earning the minimum wage but not the prevailing wage. This study will make recommendations for state legislative or policy changes regarding the employment of individuals with disabilities. Stakeholders such as the National Federation of the Blind will also participate in this study. The prevailing wage study must be completed on or before October 1, 2017.

We look forward to the implementation of this bill and to the end of the practice of paying disabled workers less than the minimum wage in 2020.

**Challenges for Blind Voters Continue in Maryland**

By Sharon Maneki

As you may remember from my Presidential Report at the 2015 convention, we were deeply concerned about the 2016 elections because the State of Maryland did not buy enough voting machines for these elections. We further voiced these concerns with Nikki Charlson, Deputy State Administrator of the State Board of Elections, at the 2015 Convention. As a result of this shortage of voting machines, the vast majority of voters will be marking paper ballots with pencils to cast their votes. While a few sighted voters may have the option of voting with a paper ballot or with the new voting machine, blind voters will be forced to vote with the new voting machine if they wish to vote independently without the help of a sighted assistant. Since paper ballots and machine ballots cannot be comingled when the votes are counted, the secrecy of a blind citizen’s vote will be significantly compromised. We stated clearly and unequivocally at our 2015 Convention that blind persons do not want to lose the privacy and secrecy of our ballots.

Since the 2015 convention, we worked with election officials and thought we had reached a satisfactory solution to this problem. However, everything changed in early February. The following article from the *Baltimore Sun* outlines the new problem.

**Maryland ditches touch screen machines for early voting**

By Pamela Wood/The Baltimore Sun/February 4, 2016

Maryland may explore ditching touch screen voting machines in favor of paper ballots.

Early voters in April's primary will cast their ballots on paper that will be scanned by a machine — just as election day voters will — after Maryland elections officials on Thursday nixed the use of touch screen machines for early voting.

The change was made after elections officials said they realized that many primary contests will feature long lists of candidates that can't fit on one screen, and some candidates threatened legal action for being stuck on a second or third screen.

"The fairest, most viable and reasonable solution is paper ballots," said Patrick J. Hogan, a former state senator who is vice chairman of the Maryland State Board of Elections. Board members voted 5-0 in favor of the switch to paper ballots for early voting.

Each early voting location will have at least one touch screen machine available for voters with disabilities who cannot vote with the paper ballot. Judges will need to be trained to alert them to the issues with races that have multiple screens of candidates, officials said.

The state's touch screen machines — which are different from ones used in recent elections — can fit seven candidates on a screen. At least half-a-dozen races in the primary feature more candidates than that, including the 12 Republican nominees for president and 13 Democrats vying for mayor of Baltimore.

Touchscreen voting machines that were going to be used during early voting in April’s primary election had to be programmed to account for a large number of candidates in several races. The machines would not have allowed voters to pick their choice until they had seen all the candidates. The Maryland State Board of Elections on Thursday nixed the use of the machines in early voting, and paper ballots will be used instead.

State Elections Administrator Linda H. Lamone said the decision to switch to paper was made after realizing the touch-screen navigational tools were not user-friendly for voters making decisions in races with multiple screens' worth of candidates.

"We didn't realize how unintuitive the navigation tools were," Lamone said.

The issue first came up in Rockville's city elections last year. And Anne Arundel County Circuit Court Judge Cathleen M. Vitale, who will be up for election this year, raised concerns at a Jan. 21 elections board meeting, according to the meeting minutes. Vitale did not respond to a request for comment.

Del. Mark S. Chang, an Anne Arundel County Democrat, tests a voting machine that is proposed to be used during early voting during a briefing in Annapolis on Jan. 29, 2016. Elections officials will meet Thursday afternoon to reconsider whether to use the machines, because all of the candidates can’t fit on one screen in some races.

In recent weeks, some candidates have suggested they may pursue legal action if the touch-screen machines were used.

"We got some not so subtle threats about litigation from candidates who would be on the second page," Lamone said.

As recently as last week, however, Lamone said publicly that elections officials and machine manufacturer Election Systems & Software had devised a fix and were ready to go forward with them for early voting.

During a briefing for lawmakers last Friday, elections officials set up a touch screen machine with mock elections for decisions such as "favorite Olympic sports" and "favorite Maryland symbols." For elections with more than seven choices, a "more" button blinked at the bottom and the voter was prevented from voting for the race until viewing all of the candidates.

"We have corrected that going forward," Lamone told lawmakers at the time.

But before Thursday's vote to switch to paper, Lamone explained that voters could get tangled in the "more" and "previous" buttons, accidentally going back to a prior contest instead of a prior page of candidates.

Switching to paper ballots for early voting — which runs from April 14 through April 21 at 66 locations across the state — will require adjustments by state and local elections workers.

More ballots will have to be printed and distributed to early voting centers. The total cost of printing extra paper ballots has not yet been determined, though they are about 21 cents each.

Some jurisdictions will face a logistical challenge in dealing with stocking dozens of types of paper ballots at the early voting centers.

In Baltimore, for example, there are dozens of combinations of City Council districts and Congressional districts, which means there could be as many as 84 types of ballots, depending on where a voter lives and what their party is, said Armstead B.C. Jones, the city's elections director. Because a Baltimore voter can vote at any of the city's six early voting centers, each center must have all 84 ballots available. Election judges will have to make sure they give each voter the proper ballot.

Prince George's County also will have dozens of ballot styles, but most counties will have fewer than a dozen.

Jones said he'll have to find the money and the staff to pull off the switch to paper ballots. "We suck it up and we get it done. Whatever comes up, that's what we do. We have to get to the end product, which is the end of the election," he said.

Local elections offices pay for the election judges, while the cost of printing ballots is split between the state and the local elections offices.

But state elections officials said Thursday they don't think it will be too hard for local elections staff to make the switch to paper for early voting. After all, they're already being trained to handle paper ballots for election day on April 26, Hogan said. The switch "shouldn't be a bigger deal than it really is," he said.

The voting machines were preferred for early voting because they can store all the various ballot styles, which is more convenient than printing out and keeping organized so many paper ballots. For election day voting, each polling location will need to have just two ballot styles on hand — one for Democrats and one for Republicans.

Del. Kathy Szeliga, who is running in the Republican primary for the U.S. Senate, is keenly aware of the challenges of having a name at the end of the ballot, no matter what type of voting system is used.

"It's certainly a challenge that every election, anybody with a last name at the end of the alphabet faces," she said.

Szeliga was slated to be listed 12th among the 14 candidates in her race on the voting machines.

David Warnock, who would have appeared 11th out of 13 Democratic candidates for Baltimore's mayor, was not terribly concerned about the issue.

The job of candidates is to prove they are qualified and that remains the same "whether you are on the bottom of a paper ballot or on the second screen" of a machine, said Anastasia Apa, Warnock's campaign manager.

During the 2014 elections, 19.1 percent of primary voters cast ballots during early voting and 17.6 percent of voters during the general election cast ballots during early voting.

The primary election day is April 26. Early voting is scheduled to run from April 14 through April 21.

Although the *Baltimore Sun* article does not mention this, here is how the decision to use only paper ballots will affect blind voters. Since only disabled voters will be using the electronic voting machine in early voting and on Election Day, our ballots will definitely be segregated. On Friday, March 4, the State Board of Elections voted to have judges encourage two people who are not disabled to vote using the electronic marking machine. This procedure will occur every day in every polling place during early voting and again in every polling place on Election Day.

While this decision is disappointing and not a real solution to the problem, we urge everyone to make your voice heard and to exercise your right to vote. Early voting will occur from Thursday, April 14, 2016, through Thursday, April 21, 2016. Voting hours occur from 10 am until 8 pm daily, (including Sunday). Check with your local Board of Elections to get the location of the early voting centers in your area. You may also vote on Election Day on April 26 from 7 am until 8 pm.

Remember to check with NFB Newsline under the local channel for ballot information such as candidate names. We will also be collecting data about your voting experience. We do not intend to lose our right to a secret ballot in future elections. Let’s make our voices heard by voting in the Primary Elections so that we can demonstrate current problems and solve them for future elections.

# STUDENT ADVOCACY IN ACTION

Editor's Note: Chris Nusbaum, President of the Maryland Association of Blind Students, is one of our up and coming leaders in the NFB. As you will see from his letter to the Maryland Congressional delegation in support of the Accessible Instructional Materials in Higher Education Act, he understands all too well what happens when textbooks are not provided in a timely manner and in a form blind students can read.

Chris Nusbaum

January 10, 2016

Maryland Congressional Delegation

Washington, D.C.

Dear Maryland Congressional Delegation:

My name is Chris Nusbaum, and I am a senior at Francis Scott Key High School in Carroll County. As a member of the National Honor Society (NHS,) academic success is of great importance to me. Along with my schoolwork, I am active in my school’s chorus, my church, and various service organizations in my community. I also happen to be totally blind. I know that blindness does not limit me in my educational and vocational aspirations. Too often, however, I and my fellow blind students are held back by a lack of access to the electronic information which is so vital to the classroom of today.

Throughout my school career, I have encountered this barrier to a full and equal education too many times to remember. However, one instance stands out as a particularly poignant illustration of this problem. Last fall I enrolled in an Advanced Placement (AP) World History class—a college-level course which relies heavily upon the class’s textbook. When the semester began, the textbook I needed was not available to me in any accessible format. My classmates were accessing the book on a school-sanctioned eBook platform from which they could download PDF files of each chapter. However, the PDF’s were scanner-produced images of the textbook, and were therefore unreadable with my screen reading software.

Each week, we were assigned two chapters to read for homework, along with a worksheet which contained questions to look up in the textbook. I did what I could using accessible Internet resources and the outdated version of the textbook I was able to obtain. However, I eventually found myself unable to complete the assignments, and my grade dropped from an A to a D. After over a month of falling further and further behind, I was finally able to acquire an accessible copy of the textbook from its publisher. After catching up on the content I had missed the previous month, I was finally able to improve my grade and ended the semester with an A in the class. However, at a crucial point in the curriculum, I was unable to earn a grade based solely on my merit, and I was subjected to a great deal of unnecessary stress do to my lack of access to the textbook.

In today’s digital world, I should not have had to face the challenges described above. Modern technology has the potential to provide blind people greater access to information than we have ever had before. However, the technology used to get at this information is often inaccessible to the blind, and institutions of higher education are unaware of the problems blind students face. For this reason, the National Federation of the Blind has proposed the adoption of the Accessible Instructional Materials in Higher Education Act (AIMHEA.) This bill would create voluntary guidelines which create criteria for the purchase of accessible products by colleges and universities. These guidelines would help institutions of higher education determine whether a product meets the accessibility requirement already established in the Individuals with Disabilities’ Education Act, while allowing blind students like myself to be confident in the knowledge that we can access the materials needed to succeed in our classes.

Therefore, on behalf of blind students across the state of Maryland, I urge you to cosponsor AIMHEA in order to ensure equal access to education for all students. As a blind person, I know that blindness has no effect on my mental capacity to succeed in any field I choose to study. In order to make full use of my academic merit, however, I need the assurance that I will have full access to the information I need to further my education. We are a nation which prides itself on its commitment to education. Let us, then, expand that commitment so that I and the blind students who come after me can realize our full potential. Please cosponsor the AIMHEA Act so this can be accomplished. Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely yours,

Chris Nusbaum, President

Maryland Association of Blind Students

A Division of the National Federation of the Blind of Maryland

# Victory In The Yasmin Reyazuddin Case

By Judy Rasmussen

We in the National Federation of the Blind often say, "we may lose the battle, but we won't lose the war. And the war isn't over until we win." This is certainly true in the Yasmin Reyazuddin case.

Many readers may be familiar with Yasmin's story. For five years, she had successfully performed her job duties as an information and referral specialist with the Montgomery County government. In 2009, the county decided they were going to consolidate information and referral staff from many agencies into one call center in the name of efficiency. County residents were supposed to obtain information about all government services by going on the web or calling 311.

Since Montgomery County officials chose not to make an effort to test the system they purchased to ensure that it worked with the JAWS screen reading software Yasmin used, she was not invited to work in the new call center. For the past six years, she has been given very little to do. This led to disappointment, discouragement, and frustration on her part. It seemed we had lost the battle.

However, we have learned never to underestimate the power and determination of the National Federation of the Blind. With the help of our legal team, Yasmin sued Montgomery County on the basis that the county failed to accommodate her to perform her job duties. After six years of depositions, attempted negotiations and long delays between court hearings, the case was finally heard by a Federal District Court jury in February 2016. Many federationists showed their support for Yasmin by attending the court hearings, testifying on her behalf, and just being her friend when she needed one.

Yasmin did a great job of presenting her story and convincing the jury of the reasons she filed the lawsuit. At one point, the county attorney presented her with a flash drive containing many e-mails sent between her and county staff regarding her situation. Much to the county attorney's chagrin, she learned that the document presented to Yasmin was not actual text files, but pictures of those files, making them impossible for her to read.

The jury was tasked to deliberate on five questions, some containing several parts. In summary, the questions were:

Did the plaintiff have a documented disability?

Did the plaintiff tell her employer she had a documented disability?

Do you believe the plaintiff can perform the essential functions of the call center job?

Was the plaintiff accommodated to perform the essential functions of the job?

Was the plaintiff accommodated outside of the call center?

If the plaintiff was not accommodated, did the lack of accommodation have an adverse effect on her upward mobility?

Did the county prove that accommodating the plaintiff would have caused an undue hardship?

The jury took four days to deliberate all of the charges. In the end, the verdict was that the county had not proven that the cost of accommodating Yasmin would have been an undue hardship.

According to documentation provided by the county, the cost to set up the call center was 11 million dollars. Based on county testimony, the cost to make the call center accessible would have been between $125,000 and $190,000.

On May 3, there will be a hearing with the county, the NFB and the judge to ensure that the county is taking steps to comply with the jury's decision. We are looking forward to reporting when all the negotiations are complete, and Yasmin is again allowed to be a productive employee.

Once again, it pays to be a member of the National Federation of the Blind, and to work collectively to improve lives for the blind of Maryland, and the nation.

# SPECTATOR SPECS

**Deaths**: We are sorry to report the death of Pauline Vigerveno on November 15, 2015. Pauline was an active member of the Greater Carroll County Chapter. Although we only had the privilege of knowing Pauline for a few months, she added much to the meetings. We will miss her enthusiasm and her zest for life.

We were saddened to learn of the death of Richard Keane, wife of Barbara Keane. Barbara has been a long-time member of the Sligo Creek Chapter. She is currently attending the core training program at Blind Industries and Services of Maryland.

**Wedding**: Congratulations to Michael Bullis and Linda Sawyer, who were married on November 22, 2015. Mike is a long-time federationist and a member of the TLC Chapter. We look forward to getting to know Linda and to seeing her at many NFB events.

**Graduation:** In December 2015, Molly Barnes received a B.A. in Political Science and Communication and Media at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. In 2015, Molly was an intern for Delegate Anthony O’Donnell in the Maryland General Assembly. She also worked for him on a part-time basis during the 2016 session. Molly hopes to get a full-time job soon. Congratulations.

**Achievement**: Congratulations to the students who participated in the 2016 Maryland Regional Braille Challenge held on January 30th at the Maryland School for the Blind. The Braille Challenge was an opportunity for braille readers from across the state to be tested on their braille skills for a chance to advance to the national competition. Twenty-five students took part in the reading and writing event. We are very proud of the following students. We are also pleased that many of these students have been participants in our NFB BELL (Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning) programs. Here is the list of participants:

**Novice (Pre-K)**, 1st Place – Oriana Riccobono.

**Novice (Kindergarten)**, 1st Place – Maddox Dalyai.

**Apprentice (Grades 1-2)**, 1st Place – Meredith Day; 2nd Place – Tyler Huber.

**Freshman (Grades 3-4)**, 1st Place – Derrick Day and Alexis McPhail; 2nd Place – Mossila Gaba; 3rd Place – Maria Zorlein; Honorable Mentions – Jose Andre Montano Baina, Sidney Iubelt, Hanna Wages, Nadezda Chernoknizhnaia, and Sydney Smith.

Nadia Graham was lucky enough to participate in the freshman bracket of the 2016 Braille Challenge while she was visiting in California.

**Sophomore (Grades 5-6)**, 1st – Sujan Dhakal; 2nd – Julia Stockburger; 3rd – Andrew Rhoads; Honorable Mentions – LaShai Richardson, Taylor Runion, and Virginia Jacobs.

**JV (Grades 7-9)**, 1st – Kayla Harris; 2nd – Steve Lin; 3rd – Anna Walker; Honorable Mentions – Gracie Zuzarte, Isis Johnson, Raheim Hawkins, and Ruben Pinales.

**Varsity (Grades 10-12)**, 1st – Naim Abuelhawa.

**Retirements:** Jean Faulkner retired from Blind Industries and Services of Maryland on March 31 after 43 years of service in the Cumberland plant; On April 30, Ruth Sager will retire from Blind Industries and Services of Maryland after over 20 years of service. Ruth initiated many of the Senior Services programs at Blind Industries. Because of her leadership, many seniors who lost their vision know that they can still live the lives they want. Congratulations to both Jean and Ruth and may they have many happy years in their new career: retirement.