I write on behalf of the National Federation of the Blind of New York State to urge your support for and active assistance in passing:

the Blind Persons' Right to Parent Act, Bill No. A1721/S4536, and;

Newsline Funding, Bill No A4590/S3599

Blind Persons' Right to Parent Act A1721 (Simon)/S4536 (Parker)

Your support and assistance in protecting our right to raise our own children is critical to affording blind New Yorkers confidence that blindness alone will never be the basis for depriving children of the right to be reared by their own parents.

All Americans have the constitutional right to fairness and impartial due process in determining issues concerning the right to have and raise children; and to have these matters addressed without bias based on preconceived conclusions regarding ability to parent.

However, when State and/or local officials charged with the administration of health and child welfare statutes, or adjudicating disputes over custody and/or visitation rights, act based on the presumption that blindness automatically means parental incompetence, parents who are blind are effectively deprived of a fair and impartial opportunity to establish that they can meet, and in many cases, exceed the “best interest of the child” standard. Thus, children of parents who are blind are subject to being removed from warm and caring homes based solely on an unwritten but often only thinly vailed presumption that blindness precludes effective parenting. These misconceptions morph into judicially sanctioned discrimination when given sole or decisive weight in determining custodial and/or visitation proceedings.

Please help us add New York to the growing list of states who have enacted legislation to safeguard the rights of blind people to parent without fear of unwarranted state interference.

Newsline Funding – A4590 (Pretlow)/S3599 (Parker)

The National Federation of the Blind of New York seeks your help in securing permanent long-term funding for the Newsline service by voting for passage of A.4590.

Since March of 2002 New Yorkers who are unable to read print because of a disability have nevertheless been able to access an increasingly vast array of newspapers, magazines and other information through the Newsline services. Proudly developed by the National Federation of the Blind and sponsored by the New York State affiliate of the National Federation of the Blind, Newsline is available to all New Yorkers who are unable to read print, blind or not, because of a disability.

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Disabled, a branch of the Library of Congress, estimates that there are approximately 600,000 persons eligible for Newsline in New York State. While many New Yorkers are now served by Newsline, many more eligible New Yorkers are not.

New York State currently imposes a small surcharge upon landline telephone services in this State. Available surplus revenues from this surcharge could be used to fund Newsline thereby enabling Newsline to reach out to New Yorkers who are eligible for the service. passage of legislation providing for more permanent funding of Newsline would provide funding from this surplus without imposing additional taxes on New Yorkers or adversely impacting other services currently funded through the surcharge.