The Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) committee is suggesting some constitutional amendments. Here’s a summary.

We want all members to be included. When we talk about universal design, we say that accessibility should be built in “from the ground up”. This is the same with inclusivity. Everything we do as an organization should be inclusive, from our founding documents, to our policies and practices, etc. While we are amending the constitution in retrospect, we are constantly acting to embody and to promote equality for all.

Gender-inclusive language: Some places in the current constitution say “he or she”, or “his or her”. We propose changing “he or she” with “they”, and “his or her” with “their”. These are in article III, Section 3, Article V, Article VII Sections 1 and 2, Article VIII, Article X, and Article XI. These are small changes, but still important.

Code of Conduct. Article III defines active and supporting members, but does not mention the Code of Conduct. At the end of sections 1 and 2 in this article, we added “members must be in good standing, as defined by the National Federation of the Blind Code of Conduct.” We do not want people who violate the code of conduct to appeal those decisions by saying that our constitution doesn’t mention that they must adhere to it.

Article VI.: We propose updating this article to reflect current technology. The board is seldom, if ever, polled by mail. And because we don’t know what technology will look like in a few years, we added a clause saying that the board may be polled by mail, electronic mail, or any other means that a majority of the board approves. We also added that the board may meet by conference telephone, conference system, or any other means that a majority of the board approves. Conference systems could include Zoom and/or other hybrid solutions.

Article XVI. This is our biggest proposed change. We added this article to ensure that virtual voting and access are permissible at chapter, division, and committee meetings, and at our annual conventions. The current constitution does not explicitly permit or prohibit these. For the past two years, we have interpreted this to mean that we may vote and meet virtually. However, we want to make sure that, in future, members may exercise their privileges regardless of physical location. Resolution 2022-01 requires that we find accessible solutions. The proposed Article XVI would require that we use those solutions, and should they become out-of-date or obsolete, that we find and implement others. This proposed article would not allow for anyone to interpret the constitution as forbidding virtual voting and access. It’s a safety net that prevents people from following the constitution exactly as previously written, by providing a new written standard. Here it is below:

ARTICLE XVI. VOTING AND ACCESS

Section 1. Voting

Formal voting may occur at chapter, division, and committee meetings, and at annual conventions. A quorum must be present at each for voting to take place. Ballots shall be taken by any means that a majority of the board approves. Any meeting at which members vote while being physically present shall also provide a virtual means of voting for members who are unable to physically attend, but who wish to exercise their membership privileges. Each virtual vote shall have the same power as each in-person vote.

Section 2: Access

All meetings and conventions (including those of chapters, divisions, and committees) with in-person components shall also have full virtual access. This virtual access shall allow all members in good standing, regardless of physical location, to exercise their membership privileges, including those of voting, speaking on the floor, holding office, and being on committees.

Everything else is unchanged. Thank you for considering our amendments. Please come to our meeting on Saturday, and more importantly, please vote for these amendments on Sunday.