

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA OF BLIND FLORIDIANS: PRIORITIES FOR THE 2009 - 2010 FLORIDA LEGISLATURE

The National Federation of the Blind of Florida (NFBF) is an affiliate of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), an organization which was formed as the "voice of the nation's blind," to present the collective views of blind people in all aspects of society. All of our leaders and the vast majority of our members are blind, but anyone is welcome to participate in our movement.

Each year, thousands of Floridians will be born blind or will become blind. Florida leads the nation as the state with the largest number of blind residents.

Our priorities for the Florida Legislature reflect an urgent need for action in four key areas of vital importance to blind Floridians. (For an explanation of these issues, please see the attached position papers.)

We would like to have legislation passed to create the Florida Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (FI IDEA) to enhance the Federal law to ensure that all of Florida's disabled children receive the most appropriate education possible. Today, in Florida each school district implements the Federal regulations which were adopted in 2004 independently with the direction of the Department of Education. A Florida IDEA would standardize requirements so that each school district would implement the law more similarly.

We wish to see Florida's White Cane Law Updated and Strengthened. Our goal is to amend the current White Cane Law (316.1301) to increase the penalty for violation; to add sections which would require the Department of Motor Vehicles to publish this law in all appropriate training materials and to include such questions on all driver license exams; to make the appropriate departments responsible for publicizing this law.

We wish to create funding that will maintain and assure stability for the NFB Newsline Program in Florida. Currently almost ten thousand print disabled persons (mostly seniors) use this program to read newspapers via the telephone without charge. Any person qualifying for Library of Congress talking Book Services is eligible. One of the most missed daily tasks for those who have read newspapers all their lives is the inability to do so. Due to the tightening of budgets in the current economic times this program is now being threatened. We believe that we have found a solution that will not cost raising of any new funds from any source. By amending S.C.91-111 S. 427.704 to provide for audio access to the newspaper for those who need it.

We need equal access to State of Florida-sponsored websites – those which exist now, and those which will be constructed in the future. We ask that the State of Florida's own web portal, **www.myflorida.com**, be made accessible to the blind as well as those with other disabilities. With the Internet becoming more important in the lives and occupations of most Americans, including those with disabilities, many educational institutions, corporations, and organizations, are working to improve the accessibility of their online presences on the World Wide Web. However, even though such accessibility is federally mandated, large and important areas of our state's own **myflorida.com** are not usable by the blind and those with other disabilities. Three years ago, the Florida Legislature passed a law mandating accessibility for new web applications. The language of current laws should also be changed to require all electronic information and information technology to become 508 compliant *retroactively* to ensure that all of it is accessible.

We, the members of the National Federation of the Blind of Florida, ask for your support to address these priorities during this legislative session. If needed legislation is adopted, the continued integration of the blind into society will be advanced. We urge every member of the Legislature to help us achieve our objectives. Our success benefits not only the blind, but all of Florida as well.

For more information on these issues, or on any other matter affecting the blind of Florida, please feel free to contact us at any time.

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