February 21, 2025

Dear Attorney General James Uthmeier:

The National Federation of the Blind of Florida is a proud affiliate of the National Federation of the Blind, the nations oldest and largest transformative civil rights organization of blind people. Established in 1940, the National Federation of the Blind brings issues of economic, educational and living needs of blind people. The National Federation of the Blind of Florida has worked since its inception in 1970 to ensure equal access for blind Floridians. We believe in the capacities and capabilities of all blind people, who come from all walks of life, socio-economic backgrounds, religions and any other intersectionality. Blindness affects us regardless of race, gender, religion, economics, other disabilities or any other measurable factor.

I am writing to you regarding the Texas v. Besserra lawsuit filed with the intended purpose of declaring Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 unconstitutional. This section guarantees that we, disabled Americans, can not be discriminated against due to disability if any entity receives federal funds to operate. This protection ensures that schools, hospitals, certain agencies and organizations meant to assist Americans in finding employment or education will not leave us, blind Americans, without the appropriate means to support ourselves and our families. Dismantling this section of the Rehabilitation Act will have a devastating effect on those of us who are already employed, those seeking employment, our children who need an appropriate education to obtain jobs in the future and will put us back decades. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a major tool in the toolbox of obtaining and sustaining employment so we may be wage-earning, tax-paying members of the communities in which we live.

Florida has over 544,000 blind or low vision citizens and 22% of our citizens have a disability. We consistently have an unemployment and underemployment rate of 60-70% of blind adults of working age. Services made available because of Section 504 have enabled blind Floridians and disabled Floridians in general, to have access to expanded transportation so we could enter the workforce and maintain employment; colleges and universities were required to create curriculums to ensure disabled people could obtain post-secondary and graduate educations to work in advanced fields. Removing the protections under this law will have a detrimental effect on the lives and futures of blind Floridians. Section 504 is not special treatment for disabled Americans, it only guarantees equal access provided to all citizens to the schools, programs and other institutions whose benefits are available to all. Disabled people are still the poorest population in our nation and retaining Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 ensures equity in the communities we live and work in.

The National Federation of the Blind of Florida strongly urging the State of Florida to withdraw from the Texas v. Besserra lawsuit. This litigation will have a detrimental, negative and demoralizing effect within all disabled communities in Florida and across the nation. Disabled people can have a positive effect on society and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a major component to achieving the American Dream of full participation in our communities and remaining productive, contributing members in society.

The National Federation of the Blind of Florida welcomes the opportunity to collaborate and work with you to ensure that blind Floridians have access to the tools necessary to be part of our communities. Section 504 plays a large role in our ability to remain part of those communities, living independently, working to support ourselves and raising our families.

Sincerely,

Camille Tate, President

National Federation of the Blind of Florida

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