



December 27, 2018

Live the life you want.

Dear Representative/Senator:

The National Federation of the Blind of Florida is part of the nation's largest consumer organization of the blind, the National Federation of the blind (NFB). One of our priorities for the blind citizens of Florida is the protection and preservation of the rights of blind parents.

Blind parents in Florida live with the fear of having their basic human right to raise their children curtailed or taken away. Social service agencies, family members and family courts remove children from their parent(s) simply because of blindness. Blind parents going through divorce proceedings or custody disputes are more likely than not to receive supervised visitation, even when no actual evidence of abuse, neglect or mistreatment has been presented. Only the assertion that blindness is the determining factor of unfitness is often sufficient to cause blind parents to have their visitation rights restricted or to lose custody of their children. The National Federation of the Blind of Florida knows that blindness is merely a characteristic that does not determine the ability of individuals to parent their child(ren). The misconceptions about blindness and the capacity of blind parents to lovingly care for their children can be changed through the education of social service agencies and family courts. We have tools and training materials for these entities that may be helpful in truly determining a parent's fitness to care for their children.

The National Federation of the Blind of Florida urges the consideration and support of the Florida legislature to protect the rights of blind parents. Enclosed please find several documents for your perusal. The first is a copy of a resolution passed at our National Convention in 2016, requesting the legislature work with us to protect the parental rights of blind Americans. The second document is a model bill that may be used as the basis for the preservation of our families. Finally, the third document is literature outlining what the public and social service agencies should know about blindness and the skills that blind parents use to lovingly and properly care for their children. The National Federation of the Blind of Florida is eager to work with all agencies involved in the protection of our children and families to ensure that blindness, by itself, is not used as a basis to tear families apart.

Please contact Camille Tate, one of our Legislative Directors, at (321) 372-4899 or ctate2076@att.net with any questions.

Sincerely,

Denise Valkema

Denise Valkema, President
National Federation of the Blind of Florida