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**NFB Pledge**

I pledge to participate actively in the efforts of the National Federation of the Blind to achieve equality, opportunity and security for the blind; to support the policies and programs of the Federation; and to abide by its constitution.

**Meeting Announcements**

**Our face-to-face chapter meetings for March and April are cancelled due to the current health crisis. Once we are able to resume chapter meetings in person, all will be notified. However, we will conduct our April meeting via teleconference. Please standby for the date, time and method of joining the call. The information will be posted to our chapter email list and those who do not have access to email will be contacted by telephone. Please bear with us during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

**Coronavirus (COVID-19) Policy**

The outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic has greatly affected people of all nations, socio-economic status and all walks of life. These are unprecedented times and we hope for the health, safety and well-being of everyone. In response to this health crisis, the National Federation of the Blind issued a policy directive to all parts of our organization, cancelling all face-to-face meetings of affiliates, divisions, chapters, committees and groups through April 12. This date may change as the global and national outlook shifts, sometimes hour-by-hour. We encourage our members to practice social distancing if you must be out in public, maintaining a minimum 6 ft. of distance from others. It is best that if you have no pressing business in the outside world, please stay at home. Refrain from touching the eyes, nose and mouth. Consistently wash your hands with soap and water. Disinfect the surfaces in your home. Although it may be tough, do not shake hands, kiss or hug others. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and World Health Organization (WHO) have established precautionary guidelines that everyone should follow. The majority of our membership is in the most vulnerable population devastated by this virus and the health and safety of our members is of utmost importance. We are a family!

We will update, through our chapter email list, any developing or urgent information regarding the Coronavirus.

**Chapter Meetings**

We have cancelled our March chapter meeting and suspendded our April meeting in response to the Coronavirus. All other chapter events are continuing to be planned. In the event of an extension of the requests of not holding large gatherings, we will continue to update all of you of any changes that may occur.

In light of all that is happening, our April chapter meeting will be held via teleconference. For some of you, this may be unfamiliar. We will provide a telephone number (at this time, it is not toll-free) that you must dial, followed by a six digit access code. For those who use a smart phone, the number can be texted to you and all that is needed is to click on the phone number link; This will dial the number and enter in the access code automatically for you. Members who do not use a smart phone or do not have long distance, someone will be able to bring you into the conference call. We will make arrangements for you.

As some of our members do not have access to email and will have the newsletter read to you, here are the rules of etiquette for conference calls. These rules are to ensure that everyone on the call can hear and no one talks over each other.

* When accessing the call, if you are coming late (i.e. after the listed time the call is supposed to start), please do not announce yourself when prompted. If someone is speaking, then you will be talking over them. The moderator of the call will wait until all talking has ceased before asking you to announce yourself.
* If you are seeking the floor to speak, please wait for whomever is talking to finish before stating your name and wait to be recognized. Again, this is to ensure that no one is talking over anyone else and so others can hear.
* If you are in an area with background noise, please mute yourself. You do this either by hitting \*6 or using the mute function in your phone app (the mute button on the side of the phone does not work if you are using a voice over function). When you want to seek the floor to speak, hit \*6 to unmute. Of course, if we have any difficulty, the moderator can mute everyone and we can proceed from there.

This information will be transmitted again as we come closer to our teleconference meeting date and will be repeated once our call has started.

We thank you for your patience with us as we weather the storm that has gathered across the globe.

**2020 State Convention**

The content of the below article has not changed. However, given current events, all information is subject to change. At this time, we are continuing to plan for our 2020 State Convention. We will update everyone when new information becomes available. Any members who have already registered for the convention and reserved their room, be assured that you are protected. Any room reservations can be refunded up to 48 hours before expected check-in date. If you have registered for the convention and banquet, we will update you regarding your fees as additional information is released.

The 2020 State Convention of the National Federation of the Blind of Florida will be held at the Embassy Suites USF in Tampa, Florida. The date will be over Memorial Day weekend, May 22-25, 2020. It will be a big year for us because we are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Florida affiliate! Room rates are $110 per night, plus applicable taxes and you are encouraged to start saving to attend. Activities and agendas will be provided as they become available. The registration fee is $25 and banquet is $40 for pre-registration. The fees will increase by $5 each at the door. Please visit nfbflorida.org for further details. Pre-registration opens on March 1. If you need assistance with online registration, please contact Camille Tate, (321) 372-4899.

Remember, the Embassy Suites rooms can accommodate 3-5 people, depending on how comfortable all parties are with one another. Each suite has a pull-out sofa bed, refrigerator and microwave. Additionally, breakfast and a Manager’s Reception are included in the room rate; the reception is held daily from 5:30 p.m.-7:30 p.m. More details will follow as they become available.

If you wish to participate in convention planning, there is a monthly open conference call for members to give their input. Our convention belongs to all of us and we encourage our membership to share their ideas. Please keep an eye on our chapter email list for meeting notices.

**2020 National Convention**

At this time, our National Convention is going on as planned. Due to the fluid situation regarding the Coronavirus, we will keep you updated as information becomes available.

The annual convention of the National Federation of the Blind has been announced! The convention will be at the Hilton Americas in Houston, Texas. The hotel address is:

Hilton Americas

1600 Lamar Street

Houston, TX 77010

(800) 236-2905

Mark your calendars for July 14-19. Next year will be the 80th anniversary of the National Federation of the Blind! The room rate will be $105 per night, plus applicable taxes and reservations can be made beginning January 1, 2020. Registration and banquet fees are $25 and $70, respectively. Online registration will open on March 1. This is advance notice for any members who wish to attend the convention.

If you have never attended a National Convention, there may be assistance provided, via application, for first-timers. The Kenneth Jernigan Scholarship information was posted to our chapter list. If you need the information again, please contact Camille Tate. All members are encouraged to attend our national conventions. Additional details will be provided upon availability.

**Washington Seminar**

**The** National Federation **of** the Blind walked the halls of Congress in February 2020. Each year we work on selected priorities to advance the goal of bringing blind Americans into equal, first-class citizenship. Each affiliate sent delegates to represent the interest of the blind with Representatives and Senators. This year the National Federation of the Blind of Florida sent thirteen delegates to Washington, D.C. Our 2020 delegation is as follows:

President Denise Valkema

State Treasurer Merry Schoch

State Board Member Camille Tate

Miami Chapter: Diana Oliveira

Broward: Nehemiah Douglas

Palm Beach: Tekesha Saffold

Central Florida: Tanya Dawson

Tampa: Yvonne Rosanelli

Daytona: Bill Outtman

Jacksonville: Russ Davis

Tallahassee: Doug Ingram

Statewide: Debbie Malone

The National Federation of the Blind of Florida is asking all members to support our legislative priorities by contacting their Representatives and Senators. This can be accomplished by calling (202) 224-3121, asking to be connected to their legislator’s office and requesting they support our legislative priorities.

Our legislative priorities for 2020 are as follows:

* Access Technology Affordability Act (ATAA), H.R.2086/S.815: A bill to provide a refundable tax credit of up to $2000, to be used over a three-year period.
* Greater Access and Independence Through Non-Visual Access Technology (GAIN), H.R.3929: A bill to make home access medical equipment, fitness equipment and home appliances accessible.
* Accessible Instructional Materials in Higher Education (AIM HI), H.R.5312/S.3095: A bill to make digital classroom materials accessible to blind students.

These are priorities we have worked on previously and will continue to work on until we achieve success! Support us by contacting our House of Representatives member, Bill Posey and our Senators, Marco Rubio and Rick Scott.

**We have a positive outlook following 2020 Washington Seminar. Overall, the National Federation of the Blind increased co-sponsorship of ATAA to 63; GAIN is up to 14; and AIM HI jumped to 12. At the time of writing this newsletter, we added Ross Spano to ATAA and Darren Soto signed on to all three of our bills. For the next several weeks, we will be posting to our list, one per week, the bills we would like our members to contact their Representatives to support. Please keep an eye out for these messages. It is only through our collective voice that we can effect change.**

**The National Federation of the Blind knows that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future. Every day we raise the expectations of blind people because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and our dreams. You can live the life you want; blindness is not what holds you back.**