



June 3, 2020

Dear Leaders of the National Federation of the Blind:

This letter is to advise you on policies of the National Federation of the Blind. Specifically, this letter relates to membership dues of the organization at all levels. To get directly to the point, membership dues are a requirement of the Constitution as set forth by the Convention and cannot be waived by a leader or board of a chapter, division, or affiliate.

The board of directors of the National Federation of the Blind has discussed this issue based on learning that some entities within the Federation have announced the waiving of membership dues for 2020. While the leadership appreciates the gesture of providing economic relief for members, this is one area that can never be compromised. Membership dues are an important way to distinguish members from non-members. The Federation membership structure has been established by the national Convention, and the Convention has given the national board authority to govern matters related to setting membership policies. Article III of the national constitution sets forth the outline of these matters. By extension, the board is responsible for certification of affiliation of all entities, and therefore all members, under the Federation structure.

The board of directors wishes to emphasize that membership dues are not intended to be a mechanism for fundraising—annual dues are intentionally kept very low. The notion of some blind people having economic difficulty is not new. Many Federation members have personally assisted other blind people who did not have the means to pay dues to the organization. One example are the student divisions where the participants frequently have very few resources. Even in those cases, each individual has to present dues to the organization to be a member or to renew their membership for the year. A general waiver of dues suggests that people need to simply say they wish to be a member, and this makes it so. That is not the standard we have approved in our organization.

We urge all chapters, divisions, and affiliates to continue to manage the process of membership with the same degree of care and openness that we have in the past. We want to welcome people of diverse backgrounds into our organization. We want to make it easy for blind people to know about membership and to join with us. We also want to make sure our onboarding process and standards are maintained. Membership in our movement is a conscious decision that blind people make. Members of the movement have always found the resources to support other individuals in joining the organization. We need to maintain both the intent of our national policies and the spirit of generosity inherent in our movement.

Please take this opportunity to clarify membership policies within the Federation and your communications. If you have accepted individuals as members who have not paid dues, we call upon you to correct this practice immediately. If you have any questions about this matter, please let me know. We understand the intent behind these actions, and we regret the confusion. Please continue to coordinate membership-related matters with our national organization and continue to find ways, within our policies, to build the movement. Thank you for your work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark A. Riccobono", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Mark A. Riccobono, President
National Federation of the Blind