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# National Federation of the Blind of Michigan Calls for Reversal of Executive Order on Commission for the Blind

## Blind Citizens to Protest Order Tomorrow

**Dearborn Heights, Michigan (February 29, 2012):** The National Federation of the Blind of Michigan, the voice of blind citizens in Michigan, calls upon Governor Rick Snyder and the Michigan Senate and House of Representatives to rescind Executive Order 2012-2 and conduct an open and transparent review of services to blind citizens. In response to legitimate concerns about mismanagement, poor performance, and a high degree of consumer dissatisfaction over the past ten years that reached a crescendo this year, Governor Snyder issued Executive Order 2012-2 abolishing the Michigan Commission for the Blind and transferring its remnants to the Michigan Department of Human Services (the welfare department) and the Michigan Department of Technology, Management and Budget.

The National Federation of the Blind of Michigan vigorously objects to Executive Order 2012-2 on several grounds:

* It appears to violate federal laws and regulations regarding rehabilitation and it jeopardizes nearly 15 million dollars in federal funds targeted to provide rehabilitation and training to approximately 2,500 blind Michigan citizens.
* It threatens the jobs of more than forty blind persons who operate vending facilities on federal property and along Michigan’s interstate highways plus an additional sixty employees of these blind entrepreneurs.
* It abolishes the Michigan Commission for the Blind, a consumer-driven board that sets policy for the agency serving blind persons. Three of the five persons on the board are required to be blind. This arrangement assured that blind citizens have oversight of services to the blind of the state.
* Neither the Governor, nor his staff, consulted with the board of the commission or any other blind person or organization representing blind persons. No staff of the agency was consulted about the necessity, viability, or legality of the executive order.
* Blind people object to being served by the Department of Human Services (the welfare department). Blind people want work, not welfare.

“Given the Governor’s emphasis on open, transparent, and data-driven decisions in state government, we are astonished by the poorly-thought-out executive order and the potential negative consequences it brings to blind people and the citizens of Michigan,” said Larry Posont, president of the National Federation of the Blind of Michigan.

“Where will the forty blind vendors go for work?” Posont continued. “What will happen to their families? This will force more people into unemployment and on to welfare rather than creating jobs as the agency is designed to do.”

“We do not have any problem with the legal structure, the staff, or the funding of the commission,” said Mike Powell, the National Federation of the Blind of Michigan’s first vice president. “It is the mismanagement of services and programs, the lack of results, and the lack of responsiveness to which we object, not the legal structure of the commission. We want a strong commission board that will make good public policy, set high goals for job placement, and raise respect for blind people here in Michigan. We call upon the Governor and the legislature to consult with the representatives of blind citizens in this state to craft a better approach than this ill-considered executive order.”

Members and supporters of the National Federation of the Blind of Michigan will gather at noon tomorrow in front of the Romney Building in Lansing to protest the executive order and inform the public about the negative impact that it will have on blind citizens of Michigan, their families, and their employees.

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**About the National Federation of the Blind of Michigan**

The National Federation of the Blind of Michigan is the state’s oldest and largest organization of blind consumers. Founded in 1941, we have chapters in most large cities in Michigan and provide advocacy, information about blindness, scholarships, and many other services that work toward our goal to change what it means to be blind in Michigan.