Dear President Riccobono.

I am sorry to have to report three deaths that I learned of during the month of January.

On January 3, I learned that long time federation member Ray Roberson died on November 16 2021 at the age of 93. (note: Ray’s last name Roberson is pronounced with the long O sound as in the word, over.)

Ray joined the NFB when it was the Michigan Federation of the Blind in 1952. During the 1970’s he was one of the true warriors in the NFB and he was an activist for civil rights and the rights of the LGBT community long before their cause received any recognition or media attention. During the time Ray was president of the Detroit chapter in the 1990’s the chapter had well over 100 members.

Ray served on the NFB of Michigan state board and worked as a client advocate and then a rehabilitation counselor when we had a strong Michigan Commission for the Blind. . Ray was also an accomplished jazz pianist and he was my piano teacher during my high school years. He was the first blind person who took me all over downtown Detroit and the first blind person who tried to impress on me that it was ok to be blind and that as blind people we could enjoy and appreciate the life we were living if we pursued it actively with love and a positive attitude. The tools Ray gave me helped in my future work as a professional musician and singer, and the seeds of NFB philosophy that he planted made me ripe for the federation when I joined the student division in1973. At our 2012 state convention I was proud to recognize Ray for his achievements as a true brother in our cause and his activism on behalf of people of color, LGBT men and women, and other minorities including those with physical disabilities.

On January 14 I also learned of the death of another giant who was known to the NFB of Michigan in the late 70’s. He was a sighted man who had a very distinguished life in Lions International and the Detroit Renaissance Lions Club.

Past Detroit chapter president John Scott informed me that Larry Young died at the age of 100. Larry will be remembered by those who were around in the late 1970’s as he served on the first Commission for the Blind Board in 1978 when The Commission for the Blind bill was adopted. Larry had always been supportive and friendly toward the NFB and contributed to our Detroit chapter with his personal donations and those made by his Club . Larry participated in chapter activities and attended meetings when his busy schedule as a Lions Governor permitted. Past state President Larry Posont can tell you stories of Mr. Young’s driving a van load of federation members to conventions.

Friends like Larry Young will always be appreciated and valued for supporting our cause and respecting the true capacity of blind people to live the life we want.

Finally, I learned this past Friday, January 21, of the death of John Fraser who died from covid at the age of 42. John was in our Detroit chapter and he had attended our last state convention that we had in person in 2019. John was known by different groups around the Detroit area and He was very concerned and actively involved with protesting the closing of the Greater Detroit Agency for the Blind and Visually Impaired without notice or communication with Detroit’s blind community. John was in the process of organizing a meeting between members of the blind community and agency representatives at the time of his death.

So in our prayers we will be remembering the families of Ray Roberson and Larry Young, who lived full and long lives, and John Fraser who left us far too soon.