**Additional Information to Keep In Mind**

**The following information is provided to offer a window into the things we find important. No specific legislation is connected to these pieces of information, but we would ask that you keep these priorities in mind as the legislative session progresses.**

**Accessible Medication Labeling**

Taking medication as prescribed is an essential aspect of remaining healthy. This chore is one that can become extremely challenging at best and can result in medication errors that result in critical illness and even death if the wrong medication is taken. Many people that are blind rely on the shape and size of medication bottles, the type of lid on the bottle, the size and shape of the medication itself and the feeling of the inscription or split lines on the medication. The problem with this method is that bottles can remain the same size with similar lids for months or years, and suddenly, either the manufacturer or the pharmacy changes it up for whatever reason. A pill that is small and squared may have a brand that is more economical for the pharmacy that produces this pill in a larger oblong format. Some brands of medications are solid caplets while others are capsules. With all of this in mind, it is not a far stretch to see how this could become problematic if you could not read the label. There is technology available to create labels that provide an audible output as well as braille and large print. This technology requires pharmacy staff to run the medication bottles through a label maker based on the end users mode of accessibility. Many pharmacies use this labeling, but unfortunately, some chain pharmacies may not want to offer the accessibility if there is another pharmacy within 25 miles. This becomes problematic for those without access to transportation that will take the person to the pharmacy that offers this level of accessibility. Other states have legislatively addressed this issue based on the desire for businesses within their state to become compliant with the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. We believe this issue is of great importance and would welcome the opportunity to work with you on the development of legislation that resolves this situation.

**Salary Range for Rehabilitation Services for the Blind Counselors**

The National Federation of the Blind is a strong proponent of education and training as the doorway to fulfilling the dream of living the lives we want. The Vocational Rehabilitation counselors working for Rehabilitation Services for the Blind are a valuable asset contributing to the success of blind Missourians. Unfortunately, the salary paid these valuable men and women is markedly less than the Vocational Rehabilitation counselors for those with other disabilities who work for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

For years, Rehabilitation Services for the Blind has had a problem attracting and keeping highly qualified counselors with a Master’s Degree and a level of experience that translates into quality, competent, dedicated, and effective counselors. The National Federation of the Blind of Missouri has encouraged raising the pay of RSB counselors to the same salary range as their VR counterparts. This will result in the recruitment and retention of highly motivated and empathetic professionals. Regrettably our suggestions have gone unheeded, and as a result, the recruitment and retention of qualified rehabilitation professionals continues to be a problem.

Missouri already has a template of salary ranges for equivalent positions as identified through the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. It is just common sense that those doing the same kind of job should reap the same reward. We urge you to explore this issue and collaborate with your colleagues to find an equitable solution to this injustice that results in the lack of acquisition and retention of individuals who will help blind Missourians to navigate from their dreams to living the life we want. It is important to note that Missouri’s Vocational Rehabilitation counselors through Rehabilitation Services for the blind are performing at a quantitively successful level. The employment retention rate of Missouri clients of Rehabilitation Services for the Blind is higher than anywhere else in the country. If we want to continue this success and demonstrate appreciation for the dedication and hard work that these counselors competently demonstrate, we must consider the value of paying these individuals a rate equivalent to their counterparts in Vocational Rehabilitation.

Safe Travel

Missouri has recognized October 15th as White Cane Awareness Day. The resolutions attached to this day acknowledge the importance of the blind to use a white cane or guide dog as necessary tools to safe and competent navigation. The National Federation of the Blind of Missouri has been increasingly receiving reports of issues related to distracted drivers who are not yielding for pedestrians using white canes or guide dogs. Something needs to be done to consistently reinforce the laws that are already in place to protect the health and well being of blind pedestrians. Between the lack of consistent enforcement and the inadequate severity of punishment, many drivers are ignoring what should be common sense, and too many blind people are experiencing near misses or being struck by cars. We believe that the legislature has the responsibility and the ability to implement changes to address the increasing issues faced due to distracted drivers and the failure of drivers to learn the necessity of yielding to those using a white cane or guide dog.