**Additional Information of Importance**

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.

**CONTINUED SUPPORT OF THE RIVER RUNNER AMTRAK LINE**

Many Missourians depend on this mode of transportation to commute to and from Jefferson City. When the funding was cut and access to this imperative point of transportation caused hardship for many people, it became even more apparent as to how imperative this service is to our lives. It is our wish that you keep this in mind as the session progresses. For people that are blind, the loss of this service resulted in much more than the simple inconvenience of having to drive themselves. Depending on the time of the meeting, what could have been accomplished in one day or with one night in a hotel quickly escalated to the requirement of a two-night stay. As you could imagine, this created a significant hardship. So, we ask you to keep this in mind as budget discussions progress.

**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.