**The Blind Missourian**

 **March 2023**

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LEGISLATIVE AGENDA OF BLIND MISSOURIANS

PRESENTED TO

THE FIRST SESSION OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND SECOND

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

From: The National Federation of the Blind of Missouri

Date: February 6 and 7, 2023

The National Federation of the Blind knows that blindness is not the characteristic that defines us or our future. Every day we raise the expectations of blind people because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and our dreams. Blindness is not what holds us back.

This is the message we bring to blind Missourians and the communities we live in. We pledge to be a resource to you and your constituents when they turn to you for help.

The National Federation of the Blind is a membership organization of and for the blind. As a volunteer, grassroots organization, we are blind people working on behalf of blind people. We come together on the local, state, and national level to address issues of importance to our fellow blind citizens. We promote programs that encourage self-determination, independence, and equality of opportunity.

**Blind Pension Legislation**

HB 510, sponsored by Representative Griffith has one simple but essential function, to remove the word certified from the law regarding correspondence with blind pension recipients. The well-intentioned insertion of the word certified has caused significant expense to the state as well as to blind recipients who are often forced to go to the post office to pick up mail that would otherwise be found in their box. Not only is this an unnecessary expense; it reduces the time blind pension recipients have to fill out the yearly recertification required and has caused a number of blind people to be terminated and subsequently reinstated, again at significant cost to the state of Missouri and its blind residents who receive the pension. Therefore, HB 510 seeks to remove the word certified from the laws governing Blind Pension. Many blind Missourians have experienced significant issues due to the certified mail requirement, and that is why the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri strongly supports this legislation as presented.

**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 user’s mode of accessibility. Many 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 HB812.

 We ask you to support this legislation and help us enhance the health and safety of all Missourians or to support any legislation that moves forward with these important provisions. We believe that this is a non-partisan issue that fundamentally improves the lives of many Missourians.

**Accessible Voting In All Elections**

The National Federation of the Blind believes that the ability to cast a private ballot securely and independently is a sacred promise allowed to every American through our constitution. We understand that discussions must be had related to voting. It is in the spirit of this understanding that we are not promoting or opposing any specific piece of legislation. We are, however, re-stating our position on the imperativeness of accessible voting for all of us. Below, we discuss the reasons behind our assertions and ask that, as you debate voting legislation throughout the session, you keep in mind how sacred your vote counting is to you. You will better understand our positions and the value we place on casting a ballot independently and privately.

Electronic voting technologies, designed and properly configured with nonvisual access, provide blind voters with the ability to cast their votes privately and independently and to verify, without sighted assistance, that their ballots accurately reflect their voting choices. Electronic voting systems were certified and purchased, and Missouri received federal funds for each polling place to provide at least one accessible voting machine. All certified machines in Missouri provide a paper trail.

The Missouri Secretary of State’s Office is evaluating newer machines that mark directly onto the paper ballot. Legislation was passed in last year’s general session to make the paper ballot the official ballot of Missouri, and. Thus, it is imperative that accessibility is in the forefront of all discussions relating to implementation of this piece of legislation. The work of the Secretary of State will also be invaluable when the existing machines need to be replaced.

Accessible machines are already required for the state to comply with HAVA. Some election boards may set these machines up more frequently than others. We ask that they be used consistently in all elections. The cost of setting them up should be minimal since “text to speech” options are available. Concerted efforts are made to get voters to the polls; Missouri should assure that when they arrive, they have the means to cast their ballots privately and independently.

Beyond the example and financial assistance HAVA has provided to emphasize accessible voting, there are two federal laws that require all elections to be accessible to bring Missouri into compliance. Voters with disabilities have the same right to vote privately and independently as do voters without disabilities.

When accessible voting machines are not present in state, county, and municipal elections, blind, visually impaired, and other print disabled voters are denied an equal opportunity to cast their ballot privately and independently. This is a violation of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. As a recipient of federal funds, Missouri and our Election Boards are required to comply with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Additionally, the Americans with Disabilities Act guarantees equal access for individuals with disabilities to the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of a public entity. Public entities must provide individuals with disabilities an aid, benefit, or service that is as effective in affording equal opportunity to gain the same result or benefit as provided to others. Public entities shall furnish appropriate auxiliary aids and services where necessary to afford individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate in and enjoy the benefits of a service, program, or activity of a public entity. To be effective, the auxiliary aids and services must be provided in such a way as to protect the privacy and independence of the individual with a disability.

Whether the financial responsibility falls on the State of Missouri or the County Election Boards is a technicality that must not continue to preclude the full participation of blind, visually impaired, or other Missourians with disabilities who could benefit from the use of accessible voting equipment. Please assert due diligence regarding bridging the gap that has prevented this legislation from passing in the past, and grant people with disabilities the opportunity and the right afforded us to have the same privilege in every election that you value and take for granted as your right as a citizen of Missouri and of the United States of America.

Jefferson City Seminar

By Eugene Coulter

On February 6 and 7 over 25 members of the state affiliate descended on our state capitol to bring attention to our legislators the issues that concern blind persons in Missouri. Nearly all members of the legislature were very receptive to our concerns. Carol and I went to twenty offices and had lengthy meetings with several representatives. By the time we left the capitol, two of the members we met had signed up to be co-sponsors of HB 510.

That bill would allow the Family Support Division (FSD) to send out Blind Pension reviews by regular mail instead of certified mail. It may be due to all of everyone’s efforts that it was scheduled for a hearing the very next week before the General Laws Committee.

Our other bill, HB 812, would mandate that prescription labels be accessible to the blind and visually impaired. This bill also received a great deal of positive feedback but unfortunately does not have any cosponsors.

It was a very positive and uplifting experience for those of us that went, and I would encourage everyone to go in the future. We can never have too many advocates. While this was a two-day experience, our job is not done. Members should write their legislators asking them to support these bills. You can easily find out who your Senator is by going to [www.Senate.Mo.Gov](http://www.Senate.Mo.Gov) and your Representatives by going to [www.House.MO.Gov](http://www.House.MO.Gov) where there are forms to look up who your elected officials are. Do not hesitate to also write members of the various committees handling the bill or legislators who represent areas nearby where you live. These pieces of legislation are important to the future of blind persons in Missouri. It should also be pointed out that FSD can begin sending out annual reviews beginning in April.

My Journey

By Kim Scharff

The last year and a half of my life has been a battle adjusting emotionally, intellectually, and physically to a relatively fast vision change from Diabetic Retinopathy that moved from stable, usable limited vision to unstable, less usable limited vision.

I had been spending too much time alone, housebound, sad, and feeling relatively useless. I needed to change that, so I decided to reach out. The helpful, friendly, inclusive response by the low vision and blind community has been unbelievably healing and helpful.

Over the last year, I initiated three new things to help me get back on my feet: I applied to guide dog schools to boost mobility confidence and to gain a fellow traveling companion; I joined a warm friendly group called Achilles Athletes whom I now walk with most Saturdays; and on account of a new friend’s recommendation (Thank you Annette Nowakoski!), I joined the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri. This week I went to my first advocacy visit to the Capitol in Jefferson City.

Jenny and Randy Carmack carpooled Nancy Aguilera, Stephanie McDowell and her guide dog Japan, and me. The two hour car ride was a quiet opportunity to get to know people better, and Jenny reviewed issues we would be bringing to Representatives and Senators.

Because I was new, I was able to pair up with Stephanie McDowell who was fabulous at helping me relax, practice, and gain confidence when I spoke with politicians.

One of the most important pieces of the Jefferson City adventure for me was that all Missouri NFB members met in a relatively quiet Capitol alcove that had tables and chairs. There was plenty of time to meet people from different parts of Missouri, most of whom had limited vision. This time together paved the way for further conversations over a long dinner later that evening. I roomed with Stephanie and Japan and that was further opportunity to hang out and get to know each other.

It helps me to hear other people’s stories around their vision and for me to feel engaged with others. I want to be able to contribute, and the people I have met in all three of these communities clearly do contribute. This trip accomplished exactly what I had hoped it would, and I feel very grateful to have been included.

My First D.C. Trip

By Amy Wilson

Since I have joined the Federation back in the Spring of 2015, I have heard about this thing called the NFB Washington Seminar. In all my travels, it was one place I had not traveled to and was excited to finally be going.

Last year I was selected to be one of the members who would go but was disappointed when it went virtual. However, that did not stop us from doing the work that needed to be done in the Federation. So with that in mind, being able to attend the 2023 Washington Seminar was a dream come true for me.

For so many of us, we have made the trip to our Missouri capitol in Jefferson City, but traveling to our wonderful nation’s capital was something else**.** For being January, the weather was agreeable for the first day or so. This allowed me to explore what DC had to offer. So, I set off and walked to the Washington Monument and after all the movies I watched, in my mind the Reflecting Pool and the Washington Monument were right there together, not the case though. It is a whole other block away. You got to love movie magic. Walking around the Reflecting Pool, I felt the great energy from all those who had been there before. I also had to go and visit Lincoln. After all, he was just sitting there checking out the Reflecting Pool too.

When I set off on my adventure that morning, I was not sure what was going to happen, but I knew with my skills and the knowledge that I could live the life I want and that anything is possible.

With adventure had, it was time to focus on the task at hand. Advocating for legislation that will improve the lives of blind Americans everywhere.

There were three legislative issues this year. For me, each of them would bring lots of value to my personal and professional life. As a business owner, accessible websites are super important for me and my clients. Then the SSDI income cliff issue has affected me deeply over the years. The biggest issue was accessible medical devices. As many of you know, my husband has Cystic Fibrosis and medical devices are part of my everyday world. This issue goes beyond us just wanting to take care of ourselves but our loved ones as well. Hopefully I opened the legislators up to how important this issue really is.

If you’re interested in learning more about the issues covered this year, check out the fact sheet on nfb.org

Besides working with fellow Federationists to meet with members of congress, I was blessed to have met new friends and I made some memories along the way. Anytime I can spend with my Federation family is important to me. Anytime I can advocate for our Federation family and the blind community is a win for me as well. With that in mind, this might have been my first year attending Washington Seminar, but it will certainly not be my last.

Cane Drivers Weekend of Fun

By Sarah Coccovizzo

This event was really helpful in teaching me and my friends a lot of independent living skills. We did a lot of socializing, cooking, and cleaning. On Friday night we got to know each other and make dinner. We had sloppy joes, and macaroni and cheese. Then I went shopping the next day. I thought that was interesting because we got to split up into groups and go to different stores and eat lunch with our friends at the mall. One of my favorite things that I did at the mall was going to the pretzel place and enjoying a nice hot pretzel. I also enjoyed the chocolate frost that I got from the pretzel place. I also got to buy my mom a gift from Bath and Body Works.

Saturday night we had tacos for dinner. They were really good. Then I got to wrap my present and bake some delicious chocolate chip chip cookies. That was another one of my favorite things to do. I really think that this experience helped me expand on my independent living skills, and I got to hang out with some of my friends from the SOAR program. I had so much fun.

Holiday Preparation Retreat: A Cane Drivers Event

By Jenny Carmack

During the weekend of November 18 - 20, 2022, thirteen teens from across Missouri, along with several adult mentors, met at an Air BnB in Columbia. Some of these teens knew each other and some did not. The goals of the weekend were to connect the teens and mentors with one another and to help the teens to build their independent living skills.

The plan was to: do some cooking/baking, plan and go on a shopping trip, wrap gifts, and get to know each other. We managed to do all of the things we planned.

The teens all took turns with the cooking. We had sloppy Joes on Friday; eggs, sausage, and toast for breakfast Saturday morning; tacos for dinner Saturday night; and baked chocolate cookies Saturday night. We all know that when you cook meals you must also…? Yep, clean it up! That is exactly what everyone did. These teens did a great job of taking turns cooking and cleaning. A couple of teens were excited to have the chance to fry the meat. One teen was nervous but proud to put toast in the oven and take it out again. The cleanup crew was good at communicating with each other on who was going to do what job. One teen said, “there are 17 of us in this house, and we are all blind, and we are just cooking by ourselves.”

On Friday after dinner, we all gathered to talk about the shopping trip to the mall, that would take place the next day. We talked about what we wanted to buy, the stores we wanted to go to, what form of payment we would make, and where we wanted to eat for lunch. Then on Saturday after breakfast was eaten and cleaned up, we split up into four groups, ordered Ubers, and headed to the mall. The teens purchased items (mostly gifts for family and friends) from stores such as Target, Bath and Body Works, and Hot Topic. When you do all that shopping, food becomes a must have. I think Auntie Anne’s was the most popular spot to grab a snack. Some of the teens had not done much shopping, and others had done a lot of it. Some groups used Aira or Be My Eyes to help navigate the mall. Those who had more experience mentored those who had less experience.

After shopping and dinner, it was time to wrap presents and bake cookies. The teens split into two groups. so half of them baked cookies while the others wrapped their gifts, and then they switched places. Everyone had the chance to bake cookies and wrap at least one gift. When baking cookies, everyone had the chance to measure and mix ingredients, roll the dough into balls, and place the pan into the oven or take it out. Oh, and of course, everyone got to eat those delicious cookies. When it came to wrapping, teens had to figure out how to cut the wrapping paper to an appropriate size, fold neatly around the item (or as neatly as possible) so that it was all covered, while also using the tape to hold it together. What do you know? Everyone had a jump on their holiday gifts.

Then came Sunday morning. Everyone was tired, some didn’t want to leave, but everyone had a good time, met new people, and learned or improved their skills. As families arrived to pick up their teen, we heard them excitedly talk about what they had done. “I learned how to make coffee; it took me a couple of tries, but I got good at it!” “I put toast in the oven and took it out all by myself!” “Look at these gifts I got for you guys, but I can’t tell you what they are!” “I picked these out all by myself!” “I fried sausage links for the first time; they were good!” “I hope we have more of these activities!” It was a weekend of building friendships, new experiences, and fun. All in all, it was everything we wanted it to be.

Chapter Elections

The Springfield Chapter held their elections; however, they were not in time for the previous issue. Here are their election results.

President: Janice Grisham Vice President: Becky Boyer
Secretary: Nella Foster Treasurer: Hal Boyer

Board Member: Connie Cameron Board Member: Jennifer Trotter

Missouri Association of Guide Dog Users and St. Louis Downtown Lions Club Participate in Blind Equality Achievement Month

By Annette Nowakowski

The Missouri Association of Guide Dog Users (MAGDU) and Downtown Lions Club teamed up to participate in the 155th Italian Heritage Parade and Festa held on “The Hill” in St. Louis on Sunday, October 9, 2022. Annette Nowakowski, Stephanie McDowell, and Judy Redlich from MAGDU participated along with Lion Eugene Morse and Lion Mel Roll from the Downtown Lions. Guide dogs Gazelle and Japan joined in as well. These two organizations partnered to celebrate Blind Equality Achievement Month by showcasing how the blind live, work, and travel in the community. MAGDU talked about how their dogs guide them using voice and hand gestures. The Lions provided information about where Lions eye glasses collection boxes are located and how used glasses are recycled and distributed to those who need them. Festa guests came away interested and informed as the two organizations demonstrated their mottos in action: "We Serve"; and "In Dog We Trust".

What Is in A Name?

By Eugene Coulter

The Missouri Affiliate has a colorful history, especially when it comes to our name and the names of our presidents. There is, unfortunately, no one around who was at our organizing meeting in 1961. Our records show however, that when George Rittgers gathered that small group, they decided on the name Federated Blind of Missouri.

This name was used until the 1962 national convention when the affiliate was recognized as the Progressive Blind and incorporated by the State of Missouri under that name in September of 1962.

The 1970s were a turbulent time for the name of our affiliate. In 1972 we became the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri Inc.; but that was not to last as another group decided to sue us over our name. In 1974 we tried to use the name National Federation of the Blind in Missouri, but under court order we were forced to change our name to National Blind in 1975. Beginning in 1977 we successfully used the name National Federation of the Blind (A Missouri Corporation).

It was not until the 1980s that we finally got to take our rightful name, the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri after quite a bit of squabble in the courts.

On a lighter note, there is something strange going on with the last three presidents of our state affiliate, particularly with their last names. First, all their names are six letters long! Incredibly all their names begin with the letter “W,” Weaver, Wunder, and Wright. To carry it one step further, they all have an “r” in their names. It sounds like a conspiracy to me; unless your last name begins with W, you will not be our president.

61st Annual Convention of the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri

By Carol Coulter

This year’s convention will be held April 13-16 at the Hilton St. Louis Airport Hotel. The hotel is located at 10330 Natural Bridge Road in St. Louis, MO. and the phone number is: 314-426-5500. You can Pre-register online at [www.NFBMO.org](http://www.NFBMO.org).

Members of the Lewis and Clark Chapter would like to welcome you to St. Louis. Come learn about issues facing parents of blind children and blind students along with many other topics. We work hard but we also have fun. So, we invite you to come join in the fun Friday night as we learn how to line dance.

The Hilton Airport Hotel has room rates of $103 a night (plus 17.338% tax). To make reservations, call 314-426-5500 before March 27. The hotel is pet friendly, free Wi-Fi, and free airport transportation. Check-in is 3:00 PM and check out is noon.

We have the Frugal Federationist Package again this year for $70 if bought by April 4. This includes convention registration, a banquet ticket, and a Saturday lunch ticket. We will also have a planned lunch for Friday and the Prayer Breakfast Sunday. After April 4 the cost for registration and all meals will increase by $5 each. Registration will be open from 8:15 to 8:45 AM and 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM Friday, and 8:00 to 8:25 AM Saturday. Hospitality will be open Friday from 5:00 PM to 10:00 PM.

We will be offering childcare (the Kid’s Zone) for those children of parents who are registered for the convention in need of supervised care. There is no additional cost for children who are registered for the convention, Care will be provided during all general sessions and the evening banquet until 9:00 PM. Meals are not provided in the Kid’s Zone, so parents need to make arrangements to feed their children. Important: Parents wanting care for their children must send this request along with payment for registration and meals on or before March 24, 2023. Mail it along with payment to: Carol Coulter 1504 Furlong Dr., Columbia, MO 65202. Note: for children not needing childcare, payments for pre-registration and meals must be received by April 4. Payments can be made at [www.nfbmo.org](http://www.nfbmo.org/). Meals and registration purchased after April 4, 2023, will cost an additional $5.00 each.

We are pleased to offer the opportunity for companies and organizations to either exhibit or sponsor our 2023 convention. from April 14-16. Exhibits will be open on Friday, April 14 from 1:00 PM to 9:00 PM. Contact Eugene Coulter at 573-474-3226 or email at gcoulter@nfbmo.org for more information.

Pledge of the

National Federation of the Blind

I pledge to participate actively in the efforts of the National Federation of the Blind to achieve equality, opportunity, and security for the blind; to support the policies and programs of the Federation; and to abide by its Constitution.

One Minute Message

The National Federation of the Blind knows that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future. Every day we raise the expectations of blind people, because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and our dreams. You can live the life you want; blindness is not what holds you back.

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### FREE MATTER FOR THE

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### NFB of Missouri

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