# **MINUTES NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND OF MONTANA CONVENTION**

October 6 and 7, 2023

* The convention was held as a hybrid convention. The in-person group met in Helena at the Ramada Inn.
* On October 6, the convention was called to Order by President Marks at about 06:30.

The following took place On Friday:

* A panel discussion took place discussing the future of the NFB. There was much discussion.
* The resolutions 2023-01 regarding voting and 2023-02 regarding vending were read.
* The meeting was adjourned for the evening.
* Starting on Saturday Oct. 7, the meeting was called to order by President Jim Marks at 8:58.

## **Board attendees:**

President, Jim Marks

First Vice-President, Joy Breslauer

Second Vice-President, Sheila Leigland

Secretary, Robert Jaquiss

Treasurer, Reggie Herbert

Board members:

Denise Moses (excused)

James Aldrich

Bruce Breslauer

Linda Hurlock

* The pledge of Allegiance was given.
* The NFB pledge was given.
* The board of directors was introduced.
* The rest of the attendees were introduced.
* Jesse Shirek was the national representative.

## New Business

* A motion was made to approve the minutes from the 2022 convention as emailed, the motion was seconded and passed unanimously.
* Reggie Herbert presented the treasurer’s report.
* A Motion was made and seconded to accept the treasurer’s report. The motion passed unanimously.

## Presentations

* Jesse Shirek gave the national report. Items discussed included filing reports with the Department of Justice and concerns about the proposed web accessibility guidelines issued in August.
* The STEM2U program was also mentioned. There will be a meeting in 2024 at NFBHQ for those affiliates who are interested in putting on a STEM2U program.
* Jim Marks gave the presidential report.

## Resolutions

* Resolution 2023-01 regarding voting was adopted.
* Resolution 2023-02 regarding the vendors program was adopted.

## Elections

* The nominating Committee chaired by Samantha Chase presented its report.
* Jacob Krissovich was elected to a two year term on the board.
* Samantha Chase was elected to a two year term on the board.
* Reggie Herbert resigned as Treasurer. Rick White was elected as treasurer to fill out the rest of Reggie Herbert’s term.
* Jim Marks was nominated and elected as the delegate for the 2024 national convention.
* A motion was made seconded and pass to have the board select the alternate delegate for national convention.
* A motion was made seconded and passed to have the board select the delegate for the Washington Seminar.

## Chapter Reports

* The At Large Chapter meets the 2nd Friday via Zoom. People are Encouraged to attend.
* The Great Falls chapter is continuing to meet.
* The Missoula Chapter has been working on resource packets and is working on articles for publication. Reggie Herbert has created a chapter website.
* The Helena Chapter was recently formed and has 13 paid members.

## Committees

* The Advocacy and Public Policy committee is chaired by Joy Breslauer. The committee tried to pass a bill to protect guide dogs. The bill to protect guide dogs died in committee. A bill was Passed to add $100,000 to the Older Individuals who are Blind program. NFB-NEWSLINE® is to be funded by Voc. Rehab.
* The Fundraising committee is chaired by Robert Jaquiss. Robert mentioned selling Sees chocolate at the upcoming Lions Christmas tree sale in Missoula.
* Ed Warrel suggested Goldstar on FB Good Nonprofits.

## Afternoon session

* There was a presentation from IRIE-AT. The presenter described their offerings from Eurobraille.
* Ed Warrel from Overhear Consulting made a presentation describing his company’s offerings.
* Dan Frye gave a presentation about Voc. Rehab and told some of his life story.
* Darrel Hannam from Voc. Rehab made a presentation. Voc. rehab can pay for tuition, technology, books supplies, Randolph Shepherd etc. The starting age for receiving assistance is 14. Voc. Rehab no longer has a waiting list. All service categories are open.
* Marilyn Bennet made a presentation about the Talking Book Library. The Utah library will scan old braille books in their collection. They are using a special scanner.
* A representative from the Secretary of State’s office made a presentation about voting. In Montana 70% of voters vote by mail.
* Jesse Shirek made a presentation on starting and passing legislation.
* George Kurscher made a presentation on Chatgpt. He will mail demos using Chatgpt.
* Samantha Chase and Robert Jaquiss made a presentation about NFB-NEWSLINE® Various access methods were described. The state of the service was also mentioned.
* Jim will appoint a convention planning committee. The next convention will likely be held in Missoula. We may hold a convention in the spring.
* The convention adjourned at 16:59

Respectfully Submitted,

Robert Jaquiss, Affiliate Secretary

## Resolutions

### Resolution 2023-01

Regarding The Use of the Electronic Ballot Return System by blind Voters in Montana

WHEREAS The ability to cast a secret ballot privately, independently, and securely is a cornerstone of our democracy; and

WHEREAS The Voting rights Act of 1965, the Americans with Disabilities Act OF 1990, (ADA), and many other CIVIL rights laws affirm that voters with disabilities should have the same opportunities to exercise their right to vote as do voters without disabilities; and

WHEREAS Montana online voting cannot be used by the blind without sighted assistance, since it requires the voter to print out, sign, date, fold, and mail the ballot to the county elections office; and

WHEREAS Many blind voters and disability rights groups have sued states over the inability to return ballots electronically; and

WHEREAS Partly as a result of these lawsuits, blind voters in 13 states are now able to return their ballots electronically; and

WHEREAS More than half the states in the U.S. allow federal military and overseas voters to return their ballots electronically via email, fax, or a secure online portal; and

WHEREAS, Federal military and overseas voters have the ability to return ballots electronically, but the blind do not: NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED by the National Federation of the Blind of Montana in convention assembled this seventh day of October, 2023, in the city of Helena, Montana, that this organization call upon Montana state government to require that the same electronic ballot return option used by federal military and overseas voters be made available to blind Montana voters, as is required by federal law.

### Resolution 2023-02

Regarding whether the Montana blind vending program should be administered by a stand-alone nominee agency or in house

WHEREAS The organized blind of Montana have always advocated for the Blind Vending Program to be administered by a nominee agency, since a stand-alone nonprofit organization centers the locus of control with the blind entrepreneurs it represents, and assures them a collective statewide voice, regardless of geographic location or vending facility type; and

WHEREAS The in-house model puts too much control in the hands of state government and too little in the hands of blind vendors; and

WHEREAS The state dropped the Blind Vending Program in the late 1980s, the legislature restored it under a nominee agency in the 1990s, and since then for nearly 25 years it has been successfully administered by Montana Business Enterprises, Inc.; and

WHEREAS In July, 2023, the Blind and Low Vision Services Bureau unexpectedly terminated its contract with Montana Business Enterprises, Inc., effective September 30, 2023, without informing or consulting the Blind Vendors Committee or the National Federation of the Blind of Montana, thereby violating the principle “Nothing about us without us”; and

WHEREAS The Blind and Low Vision Services Bureau has failed to communicate to us what they think is wrong with the current nominee system of administration, and why they think an in-house model would be an improvement over what we already have; and

WHEREAS By such actions, the Blind and Low Vision Services Bureau and its predecessors have historically shown that they do not need to consider input from blind Montanans, preferring to rely on their own perceptions of what we want, rather than working together with us to improve opportunities for blind entrepreneurs; and

WHEREAS In so doing, the Blind and Low Vision Services Bureau has disregarded both the letter and the spirit of the Montana Blind Vendors Act and the Randolph-Sheppard Act; and

WHEREAS In August the Blind Vendors Committee filed grievances with the state and federal government and called for the continuation of the administration of the Blind Vending Program through a nominee agency, a stand which we have not wavered from for at least forty years; and

WHEREAS the National Federation of the Blind of Montana believes strongly that if the Blind Vending Program is administered in house, that blind vending in Montana will eventually die: NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED by the National Federation of the Blind of Montana in convention assembled this 7th day of October, 2023, in the city of Helena, Montana, that this organization call upon the Blind and Low Vision Services Bureau to follow state and federal rules and to act inclusively with us to administer the Blind Vending Program under a nominee agency instead of in-house; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that if the program is taken in house, we call upon the Montana legislature to re-establish it under a nominee agency.