### ****James R. Gashel**** ****Secretary**** ****Advocate, Ambassador, Executive, and Father****

Jim Gashel was born in 1946 and grew up in Iowa. After his early introduction to the National Federation of the Blind as Kenneth Jernigan's student at the Iowa Commission for the Blind during the 1960s, he has been devoted to serving the blind community in various capacities. A 1969 graduate of the University of Northern Iowa with work toward a master's degree in public administration at the University of Iowa, Jim started his career teaching speech and English for one year in Pipestone, Minnesota. He then accepted a position as assistant director at the Iowa Commission for the Blind in Des Moines. With that move, he found his calling is working with the blind and finding ways of solving the problems that face them as individuals and as a minority.

On January 1, 1974, Jim joined the staff of the National Federation of the Blind as chief of the Washington office, where he became one of the best known advocates for the blind in the United States; combining his commitment to blind people with his interest in the political process. As the Federation's scope and influence evolved, so did his roles and responsibilities. In his professional career of almost thirty-four years with the Federation, he held the positions of chief of the Washington office, director of government affairs, and executive director for strategic initiatives. Jim's Federation work has led to significant changes in virtually every law directly affecting blind Americans: the Social Security Act, the Rehabilitation Act, the Randolph-Sheppard Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Copyright Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the Help America Vote Act. In addition to championing these causes, Jim has won the love and respect of the thousands of blind men and women across America who have directly benefited from his informed and effective personal advocacy. No matter what his position, through his drive and devotion to Federationism, Jim has earned the informal title of the organization's non-lawyer lawyer.

With his first wife Arlene, Jim is the father of three adult children and the grandfather of nine. His daughter Andrea and her husband Jeremiah Beasley have four children, daughter Valerie and husband Sam Costanza have three, and his son Eric and wife Miranda have two.

During Jim's service at the NFB, he received the Commissioner's Award for Outstanding Leadership in Rehabilitation Services to the Disabled, the highest honor presented by the commissioner of the United States Rehabilitation Services Administration. He is also a recipient of the secretary of labor's Outstanding American Award. In 2001 Jim and his second wife, Dr. Betsy Zaborowski, jointly received the NFB's highest honor, the Jacobus tenBroek Award, honoring them for their achievements through decades of leadership in work with the blind.

In November 2007, Jim and Betsy moved from Baltimore to Denver, Colorado, but Betsy soon died after a recurrence of the condition retinal blastoma, which had caused her blindness from childhood. In September 2012, Jim married Susan Kern, now Susan Gashel. Their marriage occurred a few months after Susan had returned to Colorado after retiring as an assistant attorney general in the state of Hawaii. Beyond continuing Jim’s active work on behalf of the blind through involvement in the Federation, and Susan’s work to uphold rights and opportunities for blind Randolph-Sheppard vendors, Jim and Susan are passionate about downhill skiing and all the Rocky Mountains have to offer near where they lived for a time in the Vail Valley of Colorado. They now live in Hawaii.

Beyond his volunteer activities, Jim served as vice president of business development and product evangelist for KNFB Reader, LLC, until his retirement in December 2017. While serving as the Federation’s executive director for strategic initiatives, he led the public introduction and launch of the Kurzweil-National Federation of the Blind Reader, the world's first truly portable text-to-speech reading device for the blind. As part of this effort he raised and administered the funds necessary to support pre-release beta testing, product announcement, and public promotional efforts to bring the product to market in 2006. Jim's work with our KNFB reading technology brought him full circle in his career since, after first meeting Ray Kurzweil in April 1975, he also organized and raised the funds necessary to test and launch the original Kurzweil Reading Machine, released in 1977 as the world's first text-to-speech reading system for the blind.

Jim was elected to the NFB's national board of directors in 2008 to fill an unexpired term and was reelected in 2009. He was then subsequently elected to the position of national secretary, a position he has held since 2010. Serving in each of these capacities, he brings to the board both expertise and contacts in the blindness field and an abiding commitment to the work of the NFB. In accepting his 2001 Jacobus tenBroek Award, Jim offered comments that remain relevant today and reflect his approach to our mission. “All I would ask is that all of you remember that it's all of our responsibilities to go out and work for the movement. We can't all go out and climb a mountain like Erik [Weihenmayer] did, and we can't all do the wonderful things that every one of you do all the time, or raise five or six million dollars like Betsy did, but we can all work for this movement. We all have a place in it.” Jim's place is absolutely unique.