Date: January 16, 2024.

Subject: Support for legislation mandating accessible prescription information.

From: R.J. Ray, Mary L. McGee, National Federation of the Blind of Iowa.

To: Iowa General Assembly.

I. Background

Every year, millions of people in the United States rely on prescription medications to sustain their health and doctors write as many as three billion prescriptions annually. Nearly fourteen million Americans, many of whom have low vision or are blind or are 65 years old or older, are not able to clearly read a prescription label. This can result in unnecessary injury or even death.

The Food and Drug Administration Safety Innovation Act makes it possible for consumers to receive information about their prescriptions in accessible formats, making instructions easier to follow for people who have a vision disability. Accessible prescription information equals independence, at least. At most, it can eliminate the risk of taking the wrong medicine or incorrect doses leading to preventable overdose, the mistreatment of health problems, emergency hospitalization, or death.

II. A great need exists for an Iowa law.

The above-referenced Federal law and the Americans With Disabilities Act, which also requires that pharmacies provide alternative format communication to customers, are not sufficient.

For example, a few months ago, a blind couple went to their pharmacy as they had done for years to have prescriptions refilled and accessible information provided. This particular day, the accessible information was lacking and, in response to an inquiry, a manager told them that the pharmacy was no longer providing alternative format information because the cost of doing so is prohibitive. They endured several months of anxiety and inconveniences before they found a new pharmacy that would meet their need for alternative formatted information relative to their multiple prescription medications.

The scenario described above should never happen in Iowa because blind and print disabled individuals have a right to the information given in the prescriptions. The information can be easily provided to consumers because the accessible formats are known and available. Producing them will not be an undue hardship on the pharmacy business. Indeed, providing such information will add value to the community and society as a whole.

State laws give more specific directions to pharmacies than federal ones because states license the pharmacies; thus, states can more closely define and regulate their activities. State laws also offer coverage to far more patients than do federal laws. Iowa needs a statute attaching accessibility to licensure to guarantee that blind and print disabled consumers have the same choices regarding prescription information as their sighted peers.

III. Formal Request

Receiving fully accessible prescription information for blind and print disabled Iowans is not a Democratic or Republican matter; it is a fundament right. Indeed, it’s a social justice and moral matter. Therefore, we respectfully ask all of you to support this bill. Thank you for your help!