Dear Governor Reynolds:

The Iowa Council of the United Blind and the National Federation of the Blind of Iowa are jointly contacting you in light of the recent resignation of Emily Wharton from her position as the director of the Iowa Department for the Blind. Our understanding of the Realignment Bill is that the governor, not the commissioners, now has the authority to hire the new director of the agency.

As blind consumers, we wish to identify criteria that the next director should exhibit . Our goal is to assist in finding applicants and a successful hire who will further the mission of the Iowa Department for the Blind, which is to “empower blind Iowans to be gainfully employed and live independently.”

First, , we believe that it is best for the director of the Iowa Department for the Blind to be a blind person. With the exception of Nancy Norman, the director of the Iowa Department for the Blind has been a blind person since 1958 when Kenneth Jernigan became the director of the agency. As you well know, under his leadership, the then Iowa Commission for the Blind became the model for blindness agencies throughout the United States. Ensuring that the agency has a blind director reinforces the conviction that has consistently guided the Iowa Department for the Blind, that principle being that “the average blind person can, with the right training and opportunity, do the average job in the average place of business as well as his or her sighted peers.”

Second, the director of the agency needs to have a knowledge of blindness training in the areas of braille education, vocational rehabilitation and independent living with a positive attitude toward blindness. This would be exhibited by several years of experience living with blind people, studying, or managing services in these areas.

Third, we believe that the director of the Iowa Department for the Blind who will serve it best is one who will find ways to be innovative. Such a director will be cognizant of new technologies, for example, as he or she furthers the vision of the Iowa Department for the Blind to be the world’s leader in blind rehabilitation services.

We appreciate your consideration of these comments. We would also offer our experiences living and working as blind people to assist in the hiring process wherever and whenever you would allow.

A black and white image of a person

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Scott Van Gorp, President

National Federation of the Blind of Iowa