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A publication of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio

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

The National Federation of the Blind of Ohio is a 501(c)3 consumer organization comprised of blind and sighted people committed to changing what it means to be blind. Though blindness is still all too often a tragedy to those who face it, we know from our personal experience that with training and opportunity it can be reduced to the level of a physical nuisance. We work to see that blind people receive the services and training to which they are entitled and that parents of blind children receive the advice and support they need to help their youngsters grow up to be happy, productive adults. We believe that first-class citizenship means that people have both rights and responsibilities, and we are determined to see that blind people become first-class citizens of these United States, enjoying their rights and fulfilling their responsibilities. The most serious problems we face have less to do with our lack of vision than with discrimination based on the public’s ignorance and misinformation about blindness. Join us in educating Ohioans about the abilities and aspirations of Ohio’s blind citizens. We are changing what it means to be blind.

The NFB of Ohio has eight local chapters, one for at-large members, and special divisions for diabetics, merchants, students, seniors, guide dog users, and members of communities of faith. This newsletter appears three times a year and is circulated by email, posted on NFB-NEWSLINE®, our digitized newspaper-reading service by phone, and can be read or downloaded from our website, www.nfbohio.org. For information about the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio or to make address changes or be added to the mailing list, call (440) 774-8077 or email barbara.pierce9366@gmail.com. For information about NFB-NEWSLINE, our free digitized newspaper-reading service, call (866) 504-7300. Local NEWSLINE numbers are: 330-247-1241 (Akron), 330-409-1900 (Canton), 513-297-1521 (Cincinnati), 216-453-2090 (Cleveland), 614-448-1673 (Columbus), 937-963-1000 (Dayton), 567-242-5112 (Lima), 567-333-9990 (Mansfield), 740-370-6828 (Portsmouth), 937-717-3900 (Springfield), 419-806-1100 (Toledo), and 330-259-9570 (Youngstown).

Dream Makers Circle

You can help build a future of opportunity for the blind by becoming a member of our Dream Makers Circle. Your legacy gift to the National Federation of the Blind or the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio can be made in the form of a will or living trust or an income-generating gift or by naming us as the beneficiary of a retirement plan, IRA, pension, or a life insurance policy. You can designate a specific amount, a percentage, or list NFB as one of several beneficiaries. For additional information contact Patti Chang at (410) 659-9314, extension 2422 or at pchang@nfb.org.

The National Federation of the Blind uses car donations to improve the education of blind children, distribute free white canes, help veterans, and much more. We have partnered with Vehicles for Charity to process donated vehicles. Please call toll-free (855) 659-9314, and a representative can make arrangements, or you can donate online by visiting [www.nfb.org/vehicledonations](http://www.nfb.org/vehicledonations).

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# **From the President’s DeskBelieving in the Full Capacity of the Blindby Richard Payne**

When I started in the Federation years ago, it was easy to be committed to a cause because many of my friends were just like me, fresh out of school and willing to work and fight for the right to be equal. Most of us graduated from the school for the blind and could not wait to be free: free from dormitories and to live in the community, free from working on the campus earning small wages, and free to be independent, integrated, and unrestricted. However, we quickly found ourselves transitioning into a segregated and sub- minimum-wage environment, hoping that a change was going to come.

So, as I reflect on my experiences as a young Federationist who worked inside the walls of a large domestic plant that employed me and hundreds of blind workers who fought for equal pay and an opportunity to advance, it has become more and more clear to me that even in 2022 that fight still remains today. I have received, mediated, and helped to source guidelines for work discrimination in a variety of vocations. The individual, gender, and skill set may be different, but the direct target is the same: blindness. Thus I have learned that discrimination is not just about the color of skin but covers a broad range of intersectionalities. We must have a safe, protected space to face issues that can improve, not only the culture of the Federation, but every social structure, protecting our right to live, play, and work equally.

Through working in the late 80’s for what is now a National Industries for the Blind workshop, I learned about a meeting held by my blind co-workers who were upset because every sighted employee received a pay raise that did not include blind employees who performed equal work. They also were concerned about the lack of upward mobility and a number of other issues that kept blind people from advancing. Needless to say, that heated discussion led to a vote to elect a spokesperson to take their concerns to the manager of the workshop. To my amazement, it was my name that was suggested, mostly because of my activity in the National Federation of the Blind of Mississippi. I assumed that many of those people who were older and much wiser than I--only eighteen at that time--would have been a better choice. When the manager of the workshop heard about blind people voting to strike and speaking against his authority, he grew angry, informing the supervisors that the blind wanted an increase in pay, which would make them lose their disability benefits. He also instructed them to find out who had attended the meeting and to report the names.

Later that afternoon I bumped into him, and his attitude toward me was as if he was speaking to a child or a worker on his plantation. That was just how he made me feel, as he told me that he had heard about the meeting and that he would be attending the next one and would put his fifty years of taking care of blind people up against our big mouths. I was livid and said to him, “It is crazy for you to talk down to me, and I look forward to seeing you at the next meeting.” Later that week every blind worker was called to the cafeteria for the meeting. The manager tried to convince us that he had to give the increase to the sighted workers because they were more qualified and getting better jobs out in the community. He said that keeping them was vital. We questioned him and explained that the blind and sighted workers did the same work, worked the same hours, and produced equally. So why was it that in his eyes sighted workers’ skills were valued, and the blind were not? Even as a young man, I recognized this as discrimination. As we all know, the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) came a few years later.

After that meeting I am sorry to say that the other blind employees who decided not to strike blamed me for starting trouble. Even some of those who wanted to strike determined not to take part in any other meetings. So the outcome was the increase in pay for the sighted workers. Later I painfully learned that the fight had been the ultimate divider among my peers. Then the workshop manager suddenly laid off most of the blind workers and kept only enough employees to fill small orders, and most of these were sighted. This was to show us that, not only could he run the plant without us, but most of us at that time could not receive unemployment insurance or get another job. As we do today when discrimination is at the forefront, we called the State Affiliate, and in some cases now the legal team at the National Office in Baltimore, Maryland, for advice, support, and direction.

I quickly called the State President of the Federation, and he communicated with the Director of Rehabilitation, who sternly informed the workshop manager that the law required that 75% of the workers had to be blind people or people with a another disability. We were immediately called back to work. Though changes were slow, blind employees began to earn higher wages because of the help of the Federation.

However, my first understanding of discrimination was not because I was blind but because of color in high school, before I lost my sight. When I was in a high school math class, the teacher would write on the board “WB,” “BB,” “WG,” and “BG.” This is how he counted his students. I enquired the meaning of the abbreviations, and he sent me out into the hall to wait for him. To my amazement he wanted to punish me. I refused to accept the punishment, so he sent me to the principal’s office. I still did not understand what was going on until after my principal took the same attitude. He sent me home with a note instructing them to punish me and not to send me back If no action was taken. My parents were outraged. To make a long story short, they went to see the administration at the school. My grandmother had fair skin, and my grandfather was a direct descendant of a slave with a very dark complexion. They were a strong combined force. They were not afraid and were very well respected. Even though I was not allowed in that meeting, I did not face any punishment, and the letters that counted the color of students in class vanished from the chalk board.

I will be the first to tell you that discrimination is not just about the color of skin but covers a broad range of intersectionalities. We must have a safe space and address issues that can improve the culture even in the Federation. It is a privilege to serve as President of the Ohio Affiliate, an entity that is diverse in many ways. Our philosophy says that blind people are as different as sighted people are; that is, we are a cross-section of the broader society and therefore not all alike as some assume. The blind have organized for the same reasons other minorities have—to make positive social change through collective action.

I believe in the capacity of the blind and will stand on this organization’s principle that “blindness is not the characteristic that defines me or my future.” I am a testament that hopes and dreams are realized through hard work, staying the course, and serving people. Everyone must have an opportunity to realize their full capacity, be it attending to the doors of a chapter meeting or testifying before Congress or working for Key Bank or Tesla. We will continue to fight for the rights of the blind with the focus being on the things that continue to keep this organizational fabric intact.

I am stronger and wiser because of who I have grown to be, but also because of the organization with which I am affiliated while fighting for change and equal measures while in the ditches of discrimination. It is the National Federation of the Blind with which I stand tall and boldly anchored, confident in the capacity of the blind.

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# **A First-Timer's Guide to Convention**

Editor’s note: Suzanne Turner called our attention to the following article on the NFB website. It is intended to be a useful introduction to the national convention for first-time attendees. But it seemed to us that it was also a valuable summary of what the Federation is and the part that the national convention plays in the lives of Federationists. The article was slightly out of date, so we have edited it for accuracy in 2022. We hope that you will find it interesting and helpful in shaping your understanding of the Federation. Here it is:

Throughout the week you will have amazing opportunities to network with thousands of competent, blind role models employed in exciting careers, attend presentations on a wide variety of empowering topics, view the latest in technology, and network with dynamic leaders in the field of blindness. A lot happens at each convention, so this guide is intended to give you an overview of what you will experience at your first convention. It is available in Braille, in large print, and on our website at www.nfb.org. For many, attendance at that very first convention has become a life-changing experience. Many hear for the very first time that it is respectable to be blind, that carrying a cane is useful and nothing to be ashamed of, that Braille is a valuable tool after all, and that much progress is being made in access technology. Attendees also learn that they are not alone, that there are others who are facing the same problems they are, and that an active and normal life is possible and within their reach. For more specific details about this year's convention, consult the convention agenda, the *Braille Monitor*, and the NFB's convention webpage.

For a more personal introduction to your first convention, plan to attend the Rookie Roundup, usually held in the evening of the first day of the gathering, this year July 5. There you will meet your fellow rookies, be welcomed by Federation leaders (including the President), and get some advice from convention veterans on what to do and when to do it. The convention is full of opportunities to learn, work, play, and network (both formally and informally). The only thing you won't get much of at a National Federation of the Blind convention is sleep!

**From the President:**

I am delighted to welcome you to your very first national convention of the National Federation of the Blind. These pages are a brief overview of our conventions and the unique role that they play in the life of our movement. Your presence at convention is important! Being here means that you are a part of the largest gathering of blind people held anywhere in the world. I believe that you can and will benefit from the strength and knowledge that you will gain from the many blind people you will meet at the convention, and the National Federation of the Blind certainly needs your ideas and your voice. I hope you come to feel the love, the power, and the unity of purpose this convention brings to blind people and their families who choose to attend--NFB President Mark A. Riccobono

**Community and Conduct at Convention**

To allow all attendees the chance to benefit from all aspects of the convention, the National Federation of the Blind is committed to providing a harassment-free environment for everyone. We appreciate your assistance in cultivating an atmosphere in which participants from diverse backgrounds may learn, network, and share with each other in an environment of mutual respect. Our organization is deeply committed to diversity as well as integrity and respect. Please contact the Information Desk or notify your state affiliate president if you need assistance or have questions/concerns. Thank you for doing your part to contribute to our community and the high expectations we strive to maintain.

**Some Notes about the National Federation of the Blind**

**A Brief Organizational History**

The National Federation of the Blind was established in 1940. Representatives from seven states gathered in Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania, for the founding convention. Those seven states were California, Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. The founder and first President of the NFB was Dr. Jacobus tenBroek, a blind lawyer born in Canada but raised primarily in California. While attending the California School for the Blind, Dr. tenBroek was taught and mentored by Dr. Newel Perry. Dr. Perry believed that the only way that the blind would improve their situation, which back then was usually one of poverty and misery, was to come together in organizations and engage in collective action. In the early part of the twentieth century, Dr. Perry himself had organized the alumni of the California School for the Blind in order to--as he put it--"escape defeatism and to achieve normal membership in society."

Dr. tenBroek spent most of his working life in Berkeley teaching at the University of California. However, in his early career, during a short teaching stint at the University of Chicago School of Law, he founded the National Federation of the Blind. Today the National Federation of the Blind has fifty-two affiliates: one in each of the fifty states, plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

**Federation Philosophy**

You will probably hear conventioneers discussing what they call "Federation Philosophy." What they are talking about is the Federation's positive belief system about blindness. Members of the Federation realized the simple truth many years ago that blind people are just people who cannot see--we are not broken sighted people. Blind people are as different as sighted people are; that is, we are a cross-section of the broader society and, therefore, are not all alike as some assume. Blindness is a physical characteristic, but it is not the characteristic that defines us or our future. It is low expectations and misconceptions, not blindness itself, that stand between blind people and our dreams. Given proper training and opportunity, blind people can and do live the lives we want. It is respectable to be blind, and, with the right tools and techniques, blindness may be reduced to the level of a nuisance or inconvenience.

To combat the low expectations, misconceptions, and stereotypes that are the true barriers to achieving our dreams, the blind have organized for the same reasons other minorities have--to make positive social change through collective action. The Federation philosophy provides an overall framework for thinking about blindness, what it means, and what it doesn't mean. However, it is not intended to be rigid or dogmatic. As we just said, blind people are individuals, and we may disagree on any number of things, including how to handle a given situation as blind people. What our philosophy does do is give us a positive way of thinking about our blindness, rather than the negative ways in which we have often been conditioned to think about it by society. Rather than saying that we as blind people can't do something, we try to find ways that we can, and to challenge each other, in a loving way, always to push the envelope and expand the limits of our independence.

As you read further, you'll discover that, to the extent we need to formulate specific positions about blindness and the policies related to it, we use a democratic process to arrive at these positions. The National Federation of the Blind also provides encouragement and support. to families with blind children and to people who are losing vision or have become blind later in life, by bringing them into a network of tens of thousands of blind people who are living full lives and who can serve as mentors and role models. Together, with love, hope, and determination, the members of the National Federation of the Blind transform dreams into reality.

**What Is the Function of the National Convention?**

The national convention is held once each year in a location chosen by the President based upon successful negotiations for the needed space. We are able to negotiate outstanding room and meeting space rates at hotels with many dining options, comprehensive room amenities, and first-rate facilities. While a lot happens at the convention, it's important to remember that its primary function is to serve as the governing body for the National Federation of the Blind. So, while some of the details in the following pages may seem very technical, it's important for you to understand how the convention works as a governing body so that you can fully participate in selecting the leadership and setting the policy of the organization.

At the convention national officers and board members are elected by the general membership, decisions concerning the organization are made, and policies are set for the following year or years. To quote briefly from the NFB Constitution (last revised in 2014):

The Convention is the supreme authority of the Federation. It is the legislature of the Federation. As such, it has final authority with respect to all issues of policy. Its decisions shall be made after opportunity has been afforded for full and fair discussion. Delegates and members in attendance may participate in all convention discussions as a matter of right. Any member of the Federation may make or second motions, propose nominations, and serve on committees; and is eligible for election to office except that only blind members may be elected to the National Board.

The national convention also has some very practical benefits for attendees. Those who are new to blindness and parents and teachers of blind children can meet and learn from successful role models and have their expectations raised. Friendships are made and renewed, the latest access technology for the blind is on display, tours of interesting places can be taken in your spare time (if you have any), and hope for the future is kindled. The convention is, in a sense, a large family gathering and has been described by one observer as analogous to an annual meeting of the Scottish clans. This means, of course, in addition to the serious business of the convention, that there are lots of opportunities just to have fun.

**How Big Is the Convention?**

NFB national conventions have experienced enormous growth through the years. There were sixteen representatives from the seven founding states at the 1940 meeting. Just two years later--at a 1942 Des Moines, Iowa, meeting--one

hundred fifty representatives from fifteen state affiliates were on hand. The convention first recorded more than one thousand attendees in 1971 in Houston, Texas. Attendance went over the two thousand mark for the first time in 1988 in Chicago. By the convention held in New Orleans in 1997, registration topped more than three thousand for the first time. Currently, between two thousand eight hundred and three thousand three hundred attendees will be present.

**The Facilities**

As mentioned earlier, the National Federation of the Blind is usually able to negotiate space and outstanding room rates at top-notch convention hotels and facilities. This means that you'll have access to a comfortable room (which you won't spend much time in), plenty of dining options, and amenities like fitness centers, swimming pools, and the like. Because we have a big convention, we need a lot of space, and sometimes navigating it can be intimidating at first. That's why your agenda will include a comprehensive description of the convention facilities and where they're located. In addition, both blind and sighted volunteers will be present throughout the convention to provide direction and help you get where you're going, if needed. So grab your cane or harness up your guide dog, and go out there and enjoy all the convention has to offer.

**The Schedule**

The NFB national convention packs an unbelievable number of activities into six days. Day one includes the parents' seminar, a national orientation and mobility conference, several technology seminars, and other special meetings and events as well as the Rookie Roundup. On day two registration begins in the morning, and the Resolutions Committee convenes in the afternoon. The agenda also lists other special meetings. On day three the national board of directors meeting, which is open to all, occurs in the morning, and various committees, groups, and divisions gather in the afternoon and evening. Day four brings the opening of the formal convention, with the roll call of states in the morning and the Presidential Report and other program items in the afternoon. There are more committee and divisional meetings on the evening of day four. On day five general convention sessions are held in both the morning and the afternoon. Elections are scheduled on this day, as well. Day six is the last day of convention; the morning and afternoon general sessions are followed by the annual evening banquet, a convention highlight.

**Convention Agenda**

The convention agenda is available at registration and can also be obtained at a number of other locations at the convention site. Moreover, it can be found on the NFB website at www.nfb.org as soon as it is final, which is usually about a month before the convention begins. The agenda gives general information about the convention, hotel rates, and other hotel information, and it shows the times and locations of the various meetings and general sessions.

**The Presidential Report**

One of the major presentations each year is a report delivered by the national President to the entire convention on the Federation's activities and progress during the previous year. All attendees are urged to be present for this major event, which is usually the first item on the afternoon agenda on day four. The President will tell you and your fellow conventioneers about the legal victories we have won after blind people faced discrimination, the new programs and initiatives we've started to help blind people achieve success in all aspects of life, the ways in which we're making technology more accessible to the blind, and more. You'll also hear the stories of individual members who are living the lives they want.

**The Banquet**

The annual banquet is the highlight of each convention. It is held on the final night of the convention. The banquet features several national award presentations, the scholarship

winners, and a major address by the national President, focusing on our philosophy of blindness and designed to inspire us to continue to build the Federation.

**Committees, Groups, and Divisions**

In addition to the three days of general convention sessions, many smaller groups affiliated with the NFB hold their annual meetings during the national convention. These are groups such as blind students, blind lawyers, parents and teachers of blind children, blind secretaries, blind businessmen and women, blind teachers, blind guide-dog users, blind computer users, blind rehabilitation professionals, blind seniors, and blind diabetics. These meetings are open to all, and you will want to look at the agenda to select those which might be of interest to you. Attendees are encouraged to attend more than one division meeting if they have interest in more than one area. Some of these committees or divisions collect dues, and some do not.

**Registration and Banquet Ticket Purchase**

For those who have not pre-registered online, registration starts on day two. All attendees are requested to register, and the outstanding hotel group rates are not available to those who do not. In addition, to be eligible for door prizes, you must be registered. An official badge is issued to each registrant and should be worn throughout convention week. Banquet tickets for the banquet held on the final night of convention week are available for purchase when you register. Banquet tickets should be purchased as early in the convention as possible and are not available for purchase after the lunch break on day four.

**The Banquet Ticket Exchange**

All convention attendees are encouraged to attend the banquet. When the convention and banquets were smaller, attendees simply went to the banquet hall, waited in line to enter, and found a seat once inside. Now, because more than two thousand people will be present, a system for reserved seating has been developed. Purchase your banquet ticket at the time of registration. Then you can turn in that ticket to whoever is assigned to get reserved seats for your affiliate, or you can pool your ticket with a group of friends so that you can all sit together. Your group designee will hand in the tickets at banquet exchange and in return will get the same number of tickets, but now with an assigned table number. You should get your new ticket from the banquet exchange designee and present it at the banquet. If needed, volunteers will help you find your table, and you can then enjoy the banquet with your Federation family.

**State Delegations in the General Sessions**

During the three days of general convention sessions, the meeting hall will be set up with flags indicating the location of each of the state affiliates. The number of seats per delegation is based upon the registration figures. It's a good idea to sit with your affiliate's delegation. In this way people can be located easily if they are needed. Moreover, official voting delegates have the membership at hand if they wish to poll the delegation on voting issues or if they wish to determine the consensus of their affiliate's representatives.

**How Is the Convention Run?**

As mentioned earlier, the national convention is the supreme governing authority of the National Federation of the Blind. Consequently, important business must be done at the convention in an orderly and democratic manner. The following information describes how the convention is run, including how votes are taken, how resolutions are considered, and more.

**General Sessions**

The general sessions consist of program items, reports, panel discussions, elections, and official votes on policy issues. General convention sessions customarily are chaired by the Federation President. Floor microphones are available for comments and questions from the audience when time permits.

**Official Voting**

Usually, on votes for elections, motions, or for the adoption of resolutions (see below), the President will call for voice votes. In such cases it is usually clear that a vast majority has voted one way or another. However, if the outcome of a particular vote is not absolutely clear, then the President will ask for a roll call vote. In the event of a roll call vote, only official delegates of the affiliates may vote. In order to be as democratic as it can be in its decision making, the Federation has decided that each state affiliate will have one vote during a roll call vote. At the opening general session, each affiliate names its official voting delegate and an alternate or alternates in the event that the official delegate is absent at the time of a given vote. Then, when a roll call vote is taken, only the official voting delegates may cast votes. Therefore, a maximum of fifty-two official votes may be cast. The secretary keeps the official tally and announces votes once decisions have been made. The official delegate may poll his or her delegation on the question or motion being considered, which is one reason why it's a good idea to sit with your affiliate's delegation. Some have asked why the Federation has not adopted a one person, one vote policy. The concern with this method is that a very few large state affiliates could control the outcome on every issue. Therefore, the Federation has opted to give each state equal representation, as the United States Constitution does with respect to the US Senate.

**Elections**

The Federation has a national board consisting of President, First Vice President, Second Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and twelve additional board members, each of whom serves for terms of two years. The five constitutional officers and six of the twelve board members are elected during national conventions in even-numbered years, and the remaining six board members are elected at conventions during odd-numbered years.

At the roll call of states held on the morning of the first general session, each affiliate announces its appointee to the Nominating Committee. The President then designates one of these nominees to be Chairperson of the Nominating Committee. This committee then develops its slate of candidates during a private meeting, which is closed to the general membership so that free and frank discussions may be held. Note: This is the only closed Federation meeting at the national convention.

The actual elections are then held during a designated general session, usually on the morning of day five. The candidate offered for each position by the Nominating Committee is first placed in nomination. The chairperson then calls for other nominations from the floor. In order to be completely open and democratic, the Federation has a long-standing policy of calling for other nominations three times before a motion to close nominations will be accepted by the chairperson. In this way it can never be alleged that a quick vote has been pushed through without time for other nominations. If no other nominations are made, then typically a motion to close nominations and elect the nominating committee's candidate by acclamation is offered. If other nominations are made, then an election is held among the candidates nominated. The chairperson will usually try to conduct the election by voice vote of the entire convention, but in the event that no candidate has a clear majority, then the chairperson will conduct a roll call vote, in which only the official delegate for each affiliate will participate.

It is also long-standing policy that an individual will not stand for election unless he or she has agreed to run. This policy avoids the problem of electing unwilling candidates.

**Resolutions**

Resolutions are the official policy statements of the organization. Anyone may offer a resolution. The customary method is to submit a proposed resolution to the Chairman of the Resolutions Committee at least two weeks before the convention. The Resolutions Committee--appointed by the President--holds a public meeting on the afternoon of day two of the convention. The resolutions that have been submitted to the committee chairperson are then considered one at a time. Typically the committee will allow the proponent of a resolution to speak in support of it; otherwise, although the meeting is public in order to maintain full transparency, only members of the committee speak during deliberations.

After full discussion of each resolution in turn, the committee votes either to pass or not pass. If the committee passes a particular resolution, then it comes before the full convention in general session for final action. This means that there will be several days in which to debate contentious issues and to try to politic for favorable votes before final convention action is taken.

If a resolution is not passed by the committee, it can still be considered by the Convention if its proponent can gather support according to the following procedure: if he or she is able to enlist five state affiliates to request that the resolution be heard, then it will be considered by the entire Convention on the final meeting day.

Although it is somewhat rare, a resolution may also be brought to the full Convention through the national board of directors. A majority of the directors must support the resolution in order to bring it to the floor in this manner.

**Other Things to Know**

**National Scholarships**

The Federation has an outstanding college scholarship program; it awards thirty national scholarships at each national convention, each in the value of $8,000. Applications close on March 31 of each year.

As many as five hundred to seven hundred individuals apply for these scholarships annually. Each spring the Scholarship Committee meets in Baltimore, evaluates the applicants, and offers scholarships to the top thirty candidates. These thirty scholars attend the national convention, with assistance from the NFB. They spend each day with designated mentors. When the students arrive, they know that they are one of the select thirty. It is not decided until a meeting of the Scholarship Committee the night before the banquet who will receive the named scholarships.

Generally the students will all receive a scholarship; the only question is who will receive which scholarship. The scholarship class together chooses which of them will be given the opportunity to represent the class by speaking briefly at the banquet.

All blind students residing and attending school in the fifty states, the District of Columbia, or Puerto Rico are invited to apply for National Federation of the Blind scholarships, even if they have previously won. Those who win a second or subsequent scholarship are called tenBroek Fellows, in honor of NFB founder Jacobus tenBroek.

**Exhibits**

A major exhibit area is designated at each national convention. This gives convention goers the opportunity to look over all of the latest access technology, to talk with officials from such agencies as the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped and the American Printing House for the Blind, and to buy items from exhibitors. Convention attendees are also invited to browse the NFB's extensive free literature collection on display as well as to examine and purchase items from the NFB store, known as the Independence Market. Because the NFB convention is the largest gathering of blind people anywhere in the world, many technology companies and others who provide products and services to the blind launch new products at our convention, so you will probably want to visit the exhibit space and find out what's new and noteworthy. Near the entrance of the exhibit area, you'll find an information table, where you can get a print or Braille map of the exhibit hall and a list of all the exhibitors and their locations.

Exhibits are open during various times throughout much of the convention, but they are closed for the general convention sessions because all conventioneers are encouraged to attend these meetings. As with other areas of the convention, the growth in the number of exhibitors through the years has been gratifying. In Atlanta in 2004, the number of exhibitors topped one hundred for the first time.

**Door Prizes**

Significant door prizes are drawn throughout general convention sessions and at the banquet. To be eligible to win, you must be registered and present at the meeting where the prize is drawn. Each morning session begins on time with a drawing for a $100 bill. Similar drawings occur periodically throughout general sessions and at the banquet. The grand prize drawn at the banquet is much larger than the others.

**Convention Fundraising**

Five different types of fundraising will be discussed during the convention. These are:

The White Cane Fund: A time will be set aside during the Convention when buckets will be passed through the audience to receive cash donations for the White Cane Fund. Affiliates will also make gifts or pledges to this fund. These dollars go directly to the general treasury of the Federation.

The Jacobus tenBroek Fund: Donations will also be made to this fund for the maintenance and upkeep of the NFB Jernigan Institute property. This property houses the operations of the NFB and other entities.

The Kenneth Jernigan Fund: The proceeds from this fund are used to bring a number of attendees to their first national convention. It is named for Dr. Jernigan, who planned our conventions for more than forty years and who did so much to make them what they are today.

The Pre-Authorized Contribution (PAC) Plan: This giving opportunity enables individuals to make regular financial contributions to support the programs and activities of the Federation. The PAC Plan has insured a consistent flow of monthly income to fund some of the Federation's work. By signing up for the PAC Plan, a donor agrees to make an automatic monthly contribution to the Federation; the donation is withdrawn directly from a checking account or charged to a credit card. The individual designates how much he or she wants to contribute each month and specifies a day of the month on which the money should be withdrawn from the account. To participate in the PAC Plan, the donor must have a checking account or credit card, complete a PAC Plan card, sign and turn over a voided check (if the contribution is to be withdrawn from a checking account), and begin with a monthly donation of at least $5.00. Supporters of the Federation contribute between $400,000 and $500,000 each year through this giving opportunity.

SUN (Shares Unlimited in NFB) Shares: Supporters of the Federation are also able to make either monthly or annual donations for SUN Shares. These funds are set aside in the event that they are needed to support the Federation during difficult times.

**Guide Dog Relief Area**

In order to accommodate blind guide-dog users at the national convention, arrangements are made each year to construct a special facility where the dogs may be taken to relieve themselves. This special area is refreshed several times each day.

Representatives of the Guide Dog Committee are available to show first-time convention goers where to take their animals and to assist in learning individual clean-up practices. Dog users are expected to use these special facilities rather than to permit their animals to relieve themselves in the streets or on other hotel property.

**Services for Spanish Speakers**

All the general sessions and the banquet proceedings are translated by volunteers for attendees who speak Spanish. Small receivers may be borrowed to listen to the audio transmission. A Hispanic Seminar and a Spanish Translation Committee meeting also take place during convention.

**Requests for Accommodations Based on Disability**

The convention of the National Federation of the Blind is designed and implemented to be accessible especially to blind people in that materials are offered in accessible formats, and other nonvisual aids are provided (therefore special requests for these items are not required). If you require specific accommodations based on your disability other than blindness, in order to participate fully and equally in the Convention, we urge you to let us know as soon as possible. Specific accommodations for which requests are required include requests for deaf or deaf-blind interpreters. Due to the size and complexity of this convention, as well as the need appropriately to plan for additional human and other resources, requests for specific accommodations must be submitted to jerniganinstitute@nfb.org no later than May 31 of the convention year.

Small receivers are available for the hearing impaired to receive direct transmissions from the public address system. For those who may be totally deaf and use a deaf-blind communication device for interpreting, volunteers are present to translate the general session and the banquet proceedings. The Deaf-Blind Division also holds a seminar and a business meeting during convention.

**Who Attends the Convention?**

Attendees may be long-time convention goers, the newly blinded, parents and teachers of blind children, blindness professionals who are interested in becoming more knowledgeable about blindness, access-technology providers, and family members of people who are blind. Most attendees are from the United States, although each year foreign visitors from as many as twenty other countries attend the convention.

**A Life-Changing Experience**

For many attendance at that very first convention has become a life-changing experience. Many hear for the very first time that it is respectable to be blind, that carrying a cane is useful and is nothing to be ashamed of, that Braille is a valuable tool after all, and that much progress is being made in access technology. Attendees also learn that they are not alone, that others face the same problems they face, and that an active and normal life is possible and within their reach. Some learn for the first time that there are orientation and adjustment centers where blind people can be sent by their rehabilitation counselors to learn the skills of blindness and the positive attitudes which lead to personal empowerment.

We hope that by attending our convention your expectations of yourself are raised, so that blindness is no longer the characteristic that defines you or your future, and that low expectations no longer stand between you and your dreams. We want you to become empowered to live the life you want.

**The President's Wrap-Up**

I hope this information has been helpful to you and that it has given you a sense of the significant role the national convention plays in the life of the NFB. I also hope your interest has been piqued and that you will continue to be an active member of our movement through your local chapter and state affiliate. Let this convention experience mark the first of many others in your life. We need your voice and your talents. Working together, with love, hope, and determination, we will continue to make a difference in the lives of blind people everywhere and transform our dreams into reality.--NFB President Mark A. Riccobono

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# **Editor’s Musingsby Barbara Pierce**

As blind people we all know that we can face an infringement of our civil rights at almost any moment. We often wonder what we would do, how we would react, how well we would understand our rights, and how far we would be prepared to go in standing up for ourselves. I was once arrested for the crime of sitting in the airplane seat to which I had been assigned. So I know that you can find yourself in the middle of a confrontation before you know what is happening.

That is the situation in which Asia Quinones-Evans of the Lorain County chapter and the Ohio Association of Blind Students found herself on February 15 of this year. The following article is a compilation of the documents in her case, but I am devoting this column to a discussion of the legal facts and personal situation that she faced.

Asia is a student at Lorain County Community College. She frequently depends on rideshare services to travel to and from classes. As has happened before, she called an Uber on February 15 to take her home at the end of the day. When the car arrived, the driver announced that she would not transport a pet. Asia explained that her dog was a trained guide dog and that Uber policy as well as federal law (the ADA) and state law (the White Cane Law) protected her right to have her dog accompany her in the car. This situation had occurred before, and Asia allowed the driver to cancel the ride and call another driver who was willing to transport a dog. This driver did neither of these things. In fact, she began talking about being allergic to dogs, and she continued to refuse to allow Asia to enter her car. Eventually she called LCCC security, and an officer arrived and in turn called an Elyria police officer.

Asia found herself in a stand-off. By this time she had grabbed the handle of the car door so that the driver could not leave. The security officer was not interested in learning about state and federal laws much less Uber company policy. He saw his job as to de-escalate the situation and keep anyone from being hurt. He told Asia to let go of the door handle; the driver did not. Both the security officer and the Elyria policeman have maintained in writing that the driver offered to call another driver and to cancel the ride. Asia maintains that she did neither. In support of Asia’s position is the fact that she was the one who ultimately canceled the ride and paid for it.

Though no one at the scene seems to have pointed the fact out, Asia had unknowingly transgressed the LCCC code of conduct, which requires students to obey orders given by security staff. Asia had been instructed to let go of the door handle and did not do so.

Eventually the Elyria police officer negotiated an agreement for the security officer to transport Asia to her destination. (Her mobile phone was dead, by now, so she could not call anyone for a ride.) Thus the confrontation was resolved, and Asia was left to pick up the pieces.

I asked Todd Elzey, who is a former attorney, what he would have done in that situation. He said unhesitatingly that he would have complied because he could have found a way to fight the accessibility battle after the fact. Mind you, Asia was not offered a resolution by the driver, and her phone was dead so, without the intervention of the police, she had no way of calling for a ride. We can argue that Asia was engaging in civil disobedience, and breaking a law or institutional rule always has the possibility of a penalty. But we would all do well to think through what our choices are in such a confrontation. Now let’s see what the documents tell us about how the case played out in the real world.

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# **The Documents in the Case**

Following are the communications in which Asia Quinones-Evens’s struggle with an Uber driver unfolded. The first one is Asia’s email to the NFB’s legal office. Here it is:

On February 15, 2022, I was denied an Uber due to my guide dog. I ordered an Uber at 4:55 pm, and it arrived at my location, Lorain County Community College, at 5:10 pm. I walked up to the vehicle and confirmed the driver's name. Before I could open the door, the driver told me she could not take a pet and that I did not order an Uber Pet for my dog. After I told her that he was not a pet but a service dog, she then changed her story to that she had allergies and could not have any animals in her vehicle due to the allergies. I did not release the handle of the vehicle and kept letting her know that in the Uber policies they must take service dogs and their handlers. This went on for about twenty minutes, and she ended up locking her doors so that I could not get into her vehicle and so she could call Uber on the phone. I was not sure if this was true because as a rider I cannot find a phone number to directly call Uber. The driver kept making protests that she could not take me and my animal because she had allergies. She kept saying specifically “animal” when I would mention that he was a service dog. The driver kept arguing that I should have ordered an Uber Pet for my dog because then the driver would have known that they would be letting an animal into their vehicle. I had the thought that something like this would happen when Uber Pet was available in most cities. This continued for a while, and she ended up rolling up her window and ignoring me holding on to her vehicle. After about another thirty minutes of this she somehow got the security of my college involved, and they contacted the Elyria Police Department, and they came out to speak to me about the situation. I continued holding on to the handle of the vehicle because I knew I was in the right to request a ride from Uber without letting a driver know that I had a service dog. I could not take a video of this entire situation because my battery on my phone was running low. When the police and the security officer were there, I told them that I had the right to the Uber that I ordered, and the driver could not deny me service just because of my service dog. The driver started to get frustrated with the fact that the officer could not cajole me to let go of her vehicle and yelled at the police officer that, if he could not get me to let go, she would press charges of kidnapping and a hostage situation. The police officer tried to convince me to go back into the building and warm up. I never had physical contact with the driver. During this entire time my phone still had power, and I was able to see that the driver never canceled the ride or ordered me another driver. I have had similar situations in the past, but the driver canceled right away and ordered me another driver. The police officer took the side of the driver of her not wanting to drive me because of allergies because his son also has allergies and, if his son got around any dog, he would have difficulty breathing. Finally my phone died, and I eventually took the option to have the security officer of the college drive me to where I wanted to go. The location I wanted to go was Avon High School, which was only about ten minutes away. I do not know what happened to the police and the Uber driver when I left. I did get my phone on charge while I was being driven to the High School and filed a complaint on the driver. The only response that I have gotten back at the time of this email is that they were sorry for my inconvenience, and they will fully investigate it. This whole situation was about an hour long while the driver refused me service, and it was about twenty-eight degrees outside with the temperature going down. While I was getting into the security officer's vehicle, the Uber driver yelled at me that I should never use my disability the way that I was. I also heard her comment to the police officer that I was making her lose money by holding her up from another ride.

There you have Asia’s account of what happened on February 15. She was soon notified by LCCC that she had violated the LCCC code of conduct. Specifically the charge that seemed to stick was that she had not obeyed the order of the security officer by refusing to let go of the door handle. The LCCC hearing officer scheduled a hearing at 4:00 on March 1. Valery Yingling, the paralegal who works at the NFB national office, and Scott LaBarre, the NFB general counsel, were both very helpful in preparing Asia for this ordeal, and Barbara and Bob Pierce, members of her chapter, attended the meeting. Asia was armed with information about the Ohio White Cane law, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Uber policy requiring their drivers to admit passengers using guide dogs. The hearing officer, Andrew Gatti, was totally uninterested in this information. He said in so many words that LCCC had no interest in state or federal law. The school has a code of conduct, which Asia had violated. Gatti had already virtually waived the penalty for a code of conduct violation by saying that the college usually dismissed the record or penalty for a first offence. But Asia had already been warned by her boss that she would lose her job because as a student senator she would be held to a higher standard. Gatti told her that she would receive a letter telling her of his decision, and she would have fourteen days to appeal the decision. We left the hearing, but Bob Pierce could not sleep that night because he was so angry at the injustice, so at three in the morning he got up and wrote the following letter to the LCCC president, hoping to warn the school that the NFB was willing to stir up press interest in this event.

March 3, 2022

Dear President Ballinger:

I am writing as secretary of the local chapter of the National Federation of the Blind. My wife and I attended a March 1 hearing of a disabled student at Lorain County Community College, Asia Quinones-Evans, before code of conduct officer Andrew Gatti, who we believe is planning to rule against her as a violator of the school code of conduct. Our understanding of the incident, which he seems to accept as factual, is as follows:

Asia called for an Uber driver to take her home. When the driver arrived, she refused to allow her to get into the car because she had a pet. Asia explained that her dog was a trained dog guide and that the driver had a legal obligation to give her service under both state and federal law as well as Uber policy. At this point the driver changed her position, claiming to have an allergy to dogs and continued to refuse her service. Asia demanded her right and held on to the car door. The driver called an LCCC security officer, who called in the Elyria police, who came and refused to insist that the driver accept Asia because his son has allergies and instructed Asia to let the driver leave. The driver asserted that Asia would have to pay the charge for the car. Asia reports that her employer in a college job has threatened to discharge her because of the sanction against her, even though the proposed penalty is apparently supposed to serve as a warning.

It seems clear to the National Federation of the Blind that LCCC has failed in its responsibility to Asia under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Despite information on LCCC’s website describing the training and work of a guide dog, its agents saw no need to support her in her clear right to public transportation for her and her guide dog. She needs the college job to help finance her continued study at LCCC. She certainly intends to appeal the ruling of your officer, and we intend to support her in that process. We hope that you will see fit to intervene in this matter, in keeping with the sterling reputation of the school as a model of community education and a supporter of all students, including the disabled.

Sincerely yours,

Robert B. Pierce

Barbara Pierce, former President, NFB of Ohio, and former editor of the Braille Monitor

This letter must have stirred up things at LCCC. Here is the response that the president wrote the same day:

March 3, 2022

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Pierce,

Thank you for your thoughtful communication and advocacy for a member of our LCCC community, Asia Quinones-Evans. Asia brings her personal experience and commitment to advocacy into her leadership work, and has contributed a great deal to our student-centered culture.

I am apologetic for Asia’s experience that day. It will continue to inform the manner in which we support student access to transportation and other basic needs. Through our awareness of the incident and conversations with Asia, we have been able to more thoroughly understand Uber’s service animal policy. We recognize that drivers working for Uber are required to facilitate such requests, and regret that this did not occur for Asia on that day.

When the safety and security of individuals on our campus becomes of concern during an incident, it is our intention to de-escalate and move toward a resolution. We then ensure students’ voices and perspectives are heard, and that incidents are reviewed and addressed fairly. Asia’s meeting with Andrew Gatti was an important step in our ability to understand this incident through Asia’s perspective, and also allowed for increased awareness of the policies of Uber and other transportation services.

Ultimately, this experience, coupled with Asia’s advocacy and leadership, has provided us with an opportunity to deepen our knowledge of accessibility challenges related to transportation and beyond.

Asia’s advocacy remains a positive characteristic in her leadership on our campus, and our teams are now equipped to serve in an advocacy role for her and other students who rely on Uber for transportation to and from our campus.

LCCC is committed to facilitating holistic, restorative discussions with students during hearings and conduct decisions. My understanding is that a decision has not yet been determined after Asia’s hearing earlier this week, though information is under review and a determination will likely be made this week.

Asia can be proud of her contributions to our campus community, and we look forward to continuing to support her in achieving her academic, career, and personal goals.

Thank you for your advocacy of Asia in her pursuit of higher education and as a member of our valued LCCC community.

Sincerely,

Marcia Ballinger

When we received that letter, we could not imagine that the school was going to penalize Asia, causing her to lose her job. Uber took four days to determine that Asia should receive $15 back from the ride charge, and they gave the driver a warning though no penalty. However, we would just have to wait for the official LCCC letter to learn what would happen as a result of the sanction. But it seemed as if we had been left with unfinished business with the Elyria Police Department. We kept remembering how the officer simply refused to enforce the law because his son suffered allergies. We had to decide whether to file an official complaint or try to educate the police department about the law. We decided to try contacting the police chief to see if we could get to first base. Here is the email that Barbara Pierce wrote to Chief William Pelko on March 7:

Dear Chief Pelko:

I am trying to contact you by this email in the hope that we can find an informal way of resolving a problem that has occurred involving Captain Hammonds. I am a member of the National Federation of the Blind of Lorain County. Ms. Asia Quinones-Evans is also a member of the chapter and a student at Lorain County Community College.

On February 15 Asia called an Uber car for a ride from LCCC to Avon High School. When the car arrived, the driver noticed that Asia was accompanied by her guide dog Grayson. She immediately refused to allow the dog into the car because she did not want to transport a pet. Asia explained that Grayson is a trained guide dog and that the Ohio White Cane Law, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Uber company policy all require that drivers allow trained guide dogs into their vehicles.

The driver then said that she was allergic to dogs, and she continued to refuse Asia entry to the car. Asia grabbed the door handle and refused to let go. The driver called LCCC security, who in turn called the Elyria Police.

The security officer ordered Asia to let go, which she refused to do, opening her to an LCCC code of conduct violation. Captain Hammonds refused to enforce the law because he said that his son has allergies, so he knew how distressing admitting the dog to her car would be for the driver.

On March 1 the code of conduct officer conducted a hearing, but no decision letter has yet been issued. The LCCC president has, however, written a letter to my husband and me the tone of which is strongly suggestive that LCCC plans to back down from the code of conduct sanction, but we do not actually know what is going to happen.

I am writing all this to you because of Captain Hamonds’ decision not to enforce Ohio and federal law in this situation. Surely the Elyria Police Department does not generally enforce only the laws its officers are sympathetic to. Do officers ignore speeders if they recognize and like them? Do they not administer breathalyzer tests to happy or cheerful drunks? Do they refuse to take seriously women who accuse men of rape if they are wearing tight clothing?

Service dog handlers have fought hard to win the right to use their animals to travel anywhere the rest of the public has the right to go. Uber has established a policy that states that drivers who do not admit service animals to their vehicles can no longer use the Uber driver’s app.

I hope that you find this incident as disturbing as I do. We can file a complaint against Captain Hammonds, but I hope that we can find a way to educate the police force about the rights of service animal users so that they can count on being supported by police officers.

I look forward to a conversation soon with you about this incident and the larger issue that it points up.

Very truly yours,

Barbara Pierce

Barbara heard nothing from Chief Pelko for several days. Eventually he did return a telephone call trying to follow up on the email. By that time he had received both the report from the LCCC security force and Captain Hammonds. We have never received these documents, but it seems pretty clear that their version of the confrontation and Asia’s were very different. Naturally enough, we believe that Asia was more accurate and that the driver may well have lied about her allergies. Asia’s phone clearly reflects the fact that, contrary to what the officers reported, the driver did not cancel the ride and try to find another driver.

The effort to educate the police force was an abject failure. The chief was prepared to push the confrontation over the supposed allergy to the absurd. He argued that, if Hammonds had insisted on forcing the driver to transport Asia and Grayson and was then involved in an accident because of the severity of her allergic reaction, Captain Hammonds would be responsible for the crash. He claimed that the police are fully aware of the White Cane Law and the ADA and that the Uber policy was not important. In short we got nothing from the discussion. There was nothing left but to wait for the letter from LCCC announcing the code of conduct decision. It was emailed to Asia on March 11, 2022

March 11, 2022

Asia Quinones-Evans

Sent electronically to a.quinonesevans1@mail.lorainccc.edu

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

Regarding Case Number: 2021005501

Ms. Quinones-Evans,

This letter is a follow-up to our recent conduct meeting where we discussed events related to the incident that was brought to our attention on February 15, 2022, on the College Center Loop. As a result of this incident and your conversation with me on March 1, LCCC has been able to thoroughly review the concern.

While Uber and other transportation services are not necessarily connected with LCCC, this incident and the following review have provided us with the opportunity to learn about the provider’s guidelines and contracted drivers’ obligation to serve individuals with service animals. Reviewing and understanding these guidelines will help us to support and advocate for you and other students who may be using the services for transportation to and from campus.

It is important to note, however, that, when the safety and security of individuals on our campus become of concern, it is our intention to de-escalate and move towards resolution. When we met and discussed this incident in full, you shared with me that you had failed to comply with college officials. I appreciated this level of honesty and admission, as following the directives of safety personnel on campus is included in our campus code of conduct.

After reviewing the statements in this case and your admissions during our meeting, I have determined that your response during the February 15 incident does violate the Code of Conduct in the following manner:

* VII Prohibited Behaviors (14): Failing to comply with directives of college officials or law enforcement officers acting within the scope of their duties.

However, you will not be sanctioned at this time and are permitted to participate in all LCCC-sponsored events and courses. All conduct-related holds have been removed from your student account.

Our conversation and this communication, however, will serve as a reminder that failure to cooperate with college officials and law enforcement while on campus may be considered violations of the Code of Conduct and could result in sanctions.

You have the right to appeal the outcome of this meeting to the Vice President of Enrollment Management and Student Services within the next 14 calendar days. To submit an appeal, please send an email to Sarah Chapman at schapman@lorainccc.edu. Your deadline to appeal is 03/25/2022, and no appeals will be accepted after this date. More information about the appeal process can be found in our Code of Conduct Procedures (https://www.lorainccc.edu/policies/campus-policies/code-of-conduct/).

Please continue to monitor your student email for any additional communications. Should you have any questions or concerns related to the information contained herein, you may contact me directly at 440-366-4776 or via the email address listed below.

Sincerely,

Andrew Gatti

Conduct Hearing Officer, Lorain County Community College

There you have it. Did Asia win or lose? She was found guilty of an infraction of the Lorain County Community College code of conduct because she did not follow the instruction of the security officer. On the other hand, she is clearly held harmless. No sanction has been recorded, and no penalty of any kind has been imposed. The president’s letter certainly expresses an institutional willingness to learn from the incident, and Asia is held harmless. The Elyria Police have certainly learned nothing, but we will count as a victory the fact that the college seems to have learned something.

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# **Asserting Your Rights When The Police Are Involvedby Todd Elzey**

Editor’s note: Todd Elzey is treasurer of the NFB of Ohio. He also has experience with law enforcement. Here is important information about how we might effectively educate police forces. This is what he says:

If you are as old as I am, you might remember that the advocacy efforts of the past often involved sit-ins in government buildings, picketing organizations like the National Accreditation Council (NAC), or refusing to give up your seat on an airline because you were blind and the airline didn’t want you sitting in an exit row or didn’t want you storing your long white cane at your seat. In those days you occasionally risked being arrested as part of these protests. The world has changed, and certainly the world of law enforcement has changed over the years. But the need to protect our rights and the need sometimes to protest in some manner when our rights as blind citizens are denied remains.

Recently we had an NFB of Ohio member who had to make the hard decision of how far to push a situation with law enforcement to protect her rights. In this situation, Asia Evans called for an Uber to pick her up from a college class. When the Uber arrived, the driver refused to transport Ms. Evans because she had a guide dog. The driver told Ms. Evans that she didn’t transport pets. Of course, Ms. Evans explained that hers was a guide dog, not a pet. Ms. Evans explained that both Uber policy and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 required the driver to transport passengers with guide dogs. The driver continued to refuse to provide transportation services, stating that she was allergic to dogs. Ms. Evans made the bold decision to hold on to the car door handle to prevent the driver from leaving without providing the transportation services she was obligated to provide. The driver called campus security.

When campus security arrived, they instructed Ms. Evans to let go of the ca handle. Ms. Evans refused, explaining that she was asserting her rights under the ADA and Uber policy to receive transportation services with her guide dog. The campus security officer did not believe Ms. Evans had this right, and, instead of helping her, he called the Elyria, Ohio, Police.

The Elyria Police dispatched a Captain who deals with issues at the college. When he arrived, he instructed Ms. Evans to let go of the door handle. When Asia explained why she was holding onto the car, the captain also refused to enforce Ms. Evans’ rights under the ADA and Ohio law. The captain stated that he would not force the driver to transport a guide dog because his son was also allergic to dogs, and he understood how bad that can be. Eventually, a peaceful resolution to this situation was found when the Elyria Police captain and Campus Security arranged alternative transportation for Ms. Evans. But this could have been a dangerous situation.

Either of the officers could have gone overboard by physically forcing Ms. Evans to release the car door handle. Campus Security could have insisted that Ms. Evans be arrested for her conduct and her refusal to comply with their order. The Elyria officer could have potentially also chosen to arrest Ms. Evans on charges for refusing a lawful order, disturbing the peace, or something similar. Had there been a physical arrest and the officer believed she was resisting by not letting go of the car door, Ms. Evans could have even been hurt.

After this incident came to light, I was asked, based on my experience as a former lawyer, whether I would have taken the same action as Ms. Evans. My response was based more on my experience of having family and friends in law enforcement and my recent experience participating in the Kettering Citizens Police Academy, than it was on my legal background.

There is little doubt in my mind that both Campus Security and the Elyria Police Department were wrong on the law. The ADA and Ohio Revised Code Section 955.43 state that businesses cannot refuse to provide services to guide dog users. In fact, Ohio Revised Code Section 955.99 makes it a 4th degree misdemeanor for a business to refuse access to a guide dog user. So I believe Ms. Evans was correct that the Uber driver was violating her rights.

That being said, even when they are wrong, if a police officer decides that he or she is right, you are almost never going to win a battle with an officer on the street. They have the badge and a gun and other tools to take control of a situation. So, once I am instructed to do something by law enforcement, I will comply with that order so long as I do not believe it will hurt me or someone else. If I truly believe the officer is wrong, and he or she is a patrolman, if the situation warrants, I would ask them to have a supervisor respond to the scene to see if a supervisor could correct the officer’s misunderstanding. But I would continue to comply with the officer’s orders until the supervisor arrived and changed those directions. If ultimately I could not get the police to change their decisions at the scene, I would end up complying with their directions and then later resolve the situation through advocacy or via a lawyer. But in this day and age, I cannot imagine anything that is worth risking a physical confrontation with law enforcement.

So the question becomes then, how can we avoid these types of situations before they even occur. Our goal should be to do everything we can to avoid having to decide between fighting for our rights, possibly going to jail or having to fight an unjust criminal charge, or even getting hurt during a confrontation with law enforcement. I believe the answer is education.

Education should go both ways though. We should educate police departments on the rights of blind Ohioans, but we should also become educated on the stresses and dangers officers face on the job so that we can understand why they behave the way they do when they respond to a call.

So how to learn about the lives of police officers you might wonder? Well, many local police departments now host what are called Citizen Police Academies. These are usually multi day events, often spread out over multiple weeks, where citizens get to attend presentations by officers and see how they do their jobs. I recently attended Kettering’s eight-week Citizens Police Academy. During the academy we heard presentations on the hiring process, the patrol function, the detective function, evidence collection, use of force policies, the dispatch function, and the relationship between police and prosecutors. We also saw demonstrations by the bike patrol, the k-9 unit, and the S.W.A.T. (Special Weapons and Tactics) team, including demonstrations of numerous firearms. The highlight of the eight-week course, though, was the interactive portions of the class where we got to interact with officers. The interactive portion of the class also included sessions where we got to try out, on the gun range, the handguns used by patrol officers.

But the most enlightening interaction portion of the Academy was the class where we got to experience the decision-making training officers are put through. In this training we were given a non-lethal training gun and we were put in two practical scenarios officers face regularly. In both scenarios, at some point something would happen where we had to decide whether or not to use the gun. Television makes it look easy to make that decision–it is not at all an easy decision. In the first scenario we had to try to talk down a person who was upset because a business wanted him charged with trespass because of aggressive behavior. In the second scenario we were put in the position of making a routine traffic stop where the person had been speeding. Neither situation was one you would anticipate being violent. But as often happens in real life, both quickly became stressful. In the trespass scenario, while I simply tried to explain to the individual that he had to leave the property, he became extremely aggressive and pulled a gun. In the second scenario, instead of simply accepting a traffic ticket, the driver immediately came out of the car screaming and waving his hands and then grabbed a baseball bat. He immediately dropped the baseball bat but continued to refuse to cooperate and escalated the situation rapidly. Then he quickly withdrew an object from his belt and pointed it it toward me.

In the first scenario I shot the suspect because he drew the gun and pointed at me. The training officer said that was the right decision given the circumstances. In the second scenario I and many other class participants shot the suspect when he drew the item from his waist. It looked like a gun, and it was a split-second decision, but, as I approached, I soon discovered what I thought was a gun turned out to be a cell phone.

In our class there was never any real danger, and everyone walked away from the exercise. But in real life these are life and death decisions that police officers have to make every single day. They never know where problems will come from or when they may have to make those life-and-death decisions. It could come on a routine traffic stop, a domestic dispute, or even a customer/Uber driver dispute.

Participating in the Citizens Police Academy gave me a new perspective on why police officers act and react the way they do. So, while they are human beings who can absolutely be wrong in their interpretations of the law, I hope that you will consider the stresses of their job and the environment they work in when deciding how far to push asserting your rights during interactions with them. Remember, if they are wrong and you can’t change their mind, you are not likely to win a battle with them in the streets, but you can change their future behavior with education and advocacy, and in the courts with lawyers. But you might never have that chance if a situation were to go horribly wrong.

The other thing I learned from the Citizens Police Academy is that most officers really do want to do the job well and are interested in hearing from and learning from the community. That is where the real opportunity to avoid problems comes in through advanced training.

The Springfield Chapter has already started working with the Springfield Police Department to provide their officers training on the rights of blind guide dog users and blind pedestrians. We encourage all chapters to join us in reaching out to their local police departments, sheriff’s offices, and even local prosecutors to educate them on the rights of blind guide dog users under Ohio Revised Code Section 955.43 and the rights of blind pedestrians under the White Cane Law.

In small towns you might be able to reach out directly to the chief of police to offer training and information. In larger cities you could still reach out to the chief’s office, but you might also consider other sections such as the department training division or the public relations department as a starting point. The level of assistance your chapter can provide each department will depend greatly on how the department handles its training. Some departments may want written material they can hand out to officers, while others might want some sort of short video presentation they can play at roll calls (beginning of each shift). And others may invite the chapter to make a short presentation at their roll calls or at a specific training event. Sometimes you’ll be presenting to supervisors, who will then present to officers. And other times you’ll be presenting directly to officers. Regardless, remember that police departments are twenty-four-hour-a-day seven-day-a-week operations, and departments have to have their officers on the streets all the time for public safety. So we’ll have to be flexible and provide the information in the format that the department believes is best for reaching their officers. The key is to get information into the hands of the departments to educate the officers about the rights of blind guide dog users to equal access to businesses and the rights of blind pedestrians under the White Cane Law.

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# **The NFB of Ohio Adopts an Inclusion Policyby Eric Duffy**

Editor’s note: On March 5, 2022, the NFB of Ohio Board discussed and adopted an inclusion policy. In the following article NFB-O secretary Eric Duffy explains the Board’s thinking and provides the text of the policy. This is what he says:

Since its founding in 1940 the National Federation of the Blind has always been a single-purpose-driven organization. We focus on blindness and to a large degree changing society’s misperceptions of and attitudes about blindness. Even during the turbulence of the 1960's, the organization’s leaders stood strong and refused to allow the Federation to get caught up in issues related to the Vietnam war and social causes of the time.

Our organizational purpose has not changed, but our understanding of social values and cultural norms has. We know that, because we are a cross section of society, we must address internally some of the social issues facing the country as a whole. We must recognize that as individual members we all have personal opinions, beliefs, and prejudices. Those things are a part of human nature. We are entitled to our personal views and convictions. We bring those things, whatever they are, to the National Federation of the Blind. We have the right to do that. What we do not have the right to do, however, is to impose our opinions, beliefs, and prejudices on others. We must treat individual members, groups of members, and those associated with the Federation in any way with respect. In other words we must check our prejudices at the door. We have an obligation to ourselves and to each other to learn new ways to view the world and to eliminate prejudice from our behavior and actions as much as possible. After all, we work to rid the world of misconceptions about blindness; we have an obligation to extend the same courtesy to those with other characteristics.

If, however, we continue to harbor long-held inaccurate and stereotypical beliefs about others, we must not let these beliefs shape our work or behavior in the National Federation of the Blind. We must treat others with courtesy and respect. In our organizational work and participation, we must apply the Golden Rule. We must treat others as we want to be treated. For several years now we have been discussing and developing a code of conduct in the National Federation of the Blind, and the Code of Conduct was adopted by the Board of Directors of the National Federation of the Blind. This code applies to all members of the Federation and anyone doing business with the organization. We have asked all members to read and agree to the Code of Conduct. We have done our best to let everyone know that it applies to every member.

Recently the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio adopted an Inclusion policy to further clarify what should already be understood after reading the Code of Conduct policy. The Board of Directors found it necessary to adopt the policy in order to further the understanding that we are an inclusive organization and that we will create and maintain safe space for all who support the policies and programs of the Federation and abide by its constitution.

On more than one occasion one member of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio has engaged in behavior intended to intimidate others. Furthermore, this member used racial slurs such as the N-word on a number of occasions. This member is now a former member, because she was expelled from the organization for that behavior. We have no tolerance for this kind of behavior from anyone whether it is the newest member or the longest serving member of the Board of Directors.

I urge you to read and understand the organization's Code of Conduct policy. I also encourage you to read and be sure that you understand the inclusion policy adopted recently by the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio. We do not take our power to discipline lightly, but bigotry and intimidation have no place in the Federation and will not be tolerated. Here is the policy. If, after reading it, you have questions, contact President Payne or any member of the Board of Directors of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio.

**Inclusion Policy**

The National Federation of the Blind of Ohio is committed to providing a safe and inclusive space for all individuals, as deeply expressed in the organization’s constitution. This principle resonates through all levels of the organization, from national to local, ensuring that all individuals have a place in our organization. Blindness is the characteristic that binds us together, but it is our intersectionalities and unique lived experiences that allow us to continue to be a thriving community for the collective action and support of the blind.

The Board of Directors of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio affirms the following policy in March 2022: we intend this consumer organization of blind people to be a safe place for individuals of every race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age, national origin, disability, nonveteran or veteran status, political affiliation, and gender identity. We expect our members to respect themselves and others and to refrain from taunting or insulting others or using derogatory language for those who do not share their convictions or life experience. We expect members to conduct themselves with civility and courtesy and to apologize any time they have failed to conduct themselves to this standard. Behavior that opposes these standards is unacceptable, and anyone unwilling to live up to these standards shall be subject to discipline up to and including expulsion from the organization by the Board of Directors.

Together we can learn what it means to be an ally to others. By being open to learning about the experiences of those with differing backgrounds from our own, we ensure the growth of a community inclusive of all. If you witness or fall victim to discrimination or insult within the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio, please notify any elected officer as soon as possible. The elected officer who receives notification of the complaint shall immediately notify the NFB of Ohio President or forward the complaint in accordance with the NFB Code of Conduct.

Enacted by the NFB of Ohio Board of Directors March 5, 2022

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# **The National Federation of the Blind of Ohio Contributes to Ohio 14C Task Forceby Todd Elzey**

Editor’s note: The NFB has been making efforts all over the country to eliminate the certificates allowing sheltered shops and other employers to pay disabled workers less, sometimes much less, than the minimum wage. We have not succeeded in getting a federal bill passed yet, so people are working state by state. Ohio is also working on this very important project. Here is Todd Elzey’s report on the Ohio effort. Todd is the NFB of Ohio treasurer. Here is his report:

The Fair Labor Standards Act Section 14(c) says that organizations can pay workers with disabilities, including those who are blind, below the minimum wage. This law has been around since 1938. Section 14(c) has resulted in many blind and disabled workers’ earning far less than a dollar an hour while they work on government contracts that earn their employers millions. The way the U.S. Department of Labor’s website justifies Section 14(c) is to say, “Employment at less than the minimum wage is authorized to prevent curtailment of opportunities for employment.”

If there was ever any true justification for paying blind and disabled workers less than the minimum wage, those days have long since come and gone. The NFB has been working to eliminate the 14(c) minimum wage exemption at the federal level with The Transition to Competitive Employment Act (H.R. 2373/S. 3238).

About a year and a half ago President Payne asked that Eric Duffy and I serve on a task force of Ohio disability advocacy organizations that were coming together to try to eliminate subminimum wage in Ohio. The group has become known as the Ohio 14C Task Force.

The task force is being coordinated by the Association of People Supporting Employment First (Ohio APSE). The task force has grown significantly over the past year and a half. In addition to the NFB and Ohio APSE, People First of Ohio, OCALI, the University of Cincinnati Center for Excellence of Developmental Disabilities (UCCEDDD), Advocacy & Protective Services, Inc. (APSI), the Ohio Self Determination Association (OSDA), the Ohio Statewide Independent Living Council (Ohio SILC), the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council (ODDC), the Ohio Network for Innovation (ONI), Disability Rights Ohio (DRO), Gentlebrook, Project SEARCH/Cincinnati Children’s Hospital, the Ability Center of Greater Toledo, and several individual and government advocates have lent their expertise to the effort.

The task force has been working with Ohio House of Representatives member Brigid Kelly (D-31) and Scott Lipps (R-62) to introduce legislation to eliminate subminimum wage in Ohio. Although it has not been introduced in the Legislature yet, Representatives Kelly and Lipps recently provided the task force with proposed bill language that would eliminate from Ohio law the ability of employers to pay workers with disabilities less than the minimum wage. The proposal would also prohibit the Ohio Director of Commerce from recognizing or issuing subminimum wage licenses. If passed by the Legislature, this bill would ensure the dignity of all workers with disabilities by ensuring that they are paid at least the minimum wage guaranteed to all other workers.

The next step in the process will be that Representatives Kelly and Lipps will issue a Dear Colleague Letter introducing the legislation and asking their colleagues in the Legislature to join them by cosponsoring the bill. As we at the NFB of Ohio know, the more cosponsors a bill receives, the more likely it is to move through the process quickly. So we are asking that you reach out to your House of Representatives member to make them aware of the imminent introduction of this bill and to request that they consider cosponsoring the legislation.

Once the Dear Colleague Letter process is complete, the bill will be assigned a bill number, introduced into the House of Representatives, and assigned to a committee. When that happens, we will be calling on NFB of Ohio members to support the legislation by contacting the committee chairman to encourage him or her to hold committee hearings on the bill as soon as possible.

Given the late introduction of this bill into the Legislature, it will be a difficult challenge to get the bill through both houses before the December 31, 2022, deadline. But with enough pressure on the Legislature, we could in fact get the bill enacted this year. Even if we do not succeed in that goal, every effort we make now to educate the Legislature about the importance of this bill will pay off in the long run. So please join in the effort to eliminate subminimum wage in Ohio by encouraging your legislator to be a cosponsor of the bill and, when the time comes, by encouraging the appropriate Committee Chairman to hold hearings expeditiously.

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# **Do you have Shelbi’s Commitmentby Eric Duffy**

Editor’s note: Eric Duffy is secretary of the NFB of Ohio. This is what he says about his close friend Shelbi Hindel:

Shelbi Hindel and I have known each other most of our lives. My mom talked to her parents before enrolling me at the Ohio State School for the Blind, where Shelbi had already been a student for a few years. We didn't run in the same circles during our school days, but all that began to change after college.

I joined the Capital Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio in the winter of 1984. Although I don't know the precise timeline, I would say that Shelbi began coming to meetings in the fall of 1985, and she joined the chapter in early 1986. We grew in the Federation and in life together. This time was also the beginning of a very strong and close friendship. We began to rely on each other during both good times and bad. We became a part of each other’s support systems.

In the year 2000 I began raising my boys as a single parent. Shelbi became even more important to me and to the boys at that point. When I had to travel to do my work in the Federation, it was often Shelbi who cared for John and Lucas. I knew that they were well cared for and that there was nothing I needed to be concerned about while she was caring for them. In fact I knew that they not only got care, but they also got her love, and the bonding among the kids led to lasting friendships even through the trying times ahead. We loved each other’s children as we did our own. That's the way life went for many years.

It was not until 2012 that we allowed our friendship to blossom into a strong love for each other. But that it did, and that continued through 2016. In the spring of 2016 I took a job with the New Jersey Commission for the Blind. This meant that I went to live in Newark, New Jersey, and Shelbi stayed back in Columbus. It did not take long until I had destroyed all that we had built over the years. I destroyed our friendship. I sacrificed our love.

I married someone else.

Don't stop reading just yet. I am getting to the point about commitment to the National Federation of the Blind. Up until this point, much of what we did in the Federation, Shelbi and I did together. Now she was back in Ohio without any contact or support from me in any way. But she continued to be involved in the Federation. Her commitment to the organization did not waiver.

Fast forward to 2019 when I returned to Columbus. Shelbi and I attended a meeting of the Capital chapter without knowing that the other would be there. I have always said that I would not let anyone keep me from participating in a Federation meeting or activity. I believe that is true. Shelbi took a slightly different approach, however. She determined that she did not want to be where I was. She decided she would not participate in the chapter as long as I was involved. This included Zoom meetings. She did remain active in the Merchants and Krafters divisions. Shelbi was very hurt by my actions, and, although I understood her decision, I didn't like it. I wanted her to remain actively involved in the Federation.

Why do I tell this story? Because in the course of human interaction, things are said and done that hurt others. Many times we say or do things that upset or offend someone without ever realizing how our words or actions might affect someone else. This is not because we are mean, insensitive, or bullies. It is because we don't have that person's lived experience and therefore do not have their perspective on the world. But the work of the National Federation of the Blind must go on. The things we must do to change what it means to be blind must still be done. The next generation of the blind is counting on us to do our part. That is what we must do even when someone has caused us emotional pain or offended us. There is room for everyone in this organization, and we must all do our part to fill our space with a bright and shining light that gives hope to the blind of today and tomorrow.

When I left Columbus, Shelbi once again joined the chapter and is an active member. As the late Paul Harvey used to say, "and now, the rest of the story." Since late February of this year, Shelbi and I are again sharing life together. We are again building the Federation together, and that is as it should be. We are together again because of the love and the grace she has inside her. I am grateful for that. I am equally grateful that she didn't just walk away from the Federation even in her deepest time of hurt. The National Federation of the Blind is bigger than any one of us. If the time comes when you are hurt by one of your Federation family members, reach down deep and find that same commitment to the organization that Shelbi has.

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# **The Right to Parentby Suzanne Turner**

Editor’s note: Suzanne Turner is Vice President of the NFB of Ohio. In the following article she struggles with very personal decisions that have helped to shape her life. Her blindness was undoubtedly part of the reason she did not receive the support she needed, but her grief and suffering are more globally relevant in this moment than the absence of sight. This is what she says:

As we are being inundated with information on the Supreme Court’s decision on Row v Wade, it has occurred to me over the last two weeks that all of this discourse has once again influenced my thoughts and attitudes about this subject. For over a decade I have paid attention to the political debate regarding who is right and who is wrong, when is it acceptable to abort a fetus during pregnancy, or even whether the father has a say. Be it interviews on talk shows, picket signs displayed at abortion clinics, or talk at the dinner table, often I have found it overwhelming.

Women like me who are forgotten during all of this conversation do not know where we fit in or even understand the actual debate. Speaking personally, I cannot hear what either side is saying because of the noise in my head and heart. It is quite difficult, an emotional roller coaster. What about me, I ask those who are taking sides. I also wonder about the families who had their fertilized eggs destroyed at the University Hospital Fertility Clinic. Although it was not done with malicious intent, I am certain that those families affected felt that it was. Their right to parent had been snuffed out with no hope of reparation.

As I mentioned, for the last couple of weeks I have been emotionally drained, reminiscing about a part of my life that is difficult to talk about. However, as our philosophy says, we the blind are a cross section of the broader society, and we are also mentors to thousands of blind people. If I can help someone or lend a listening ear, my purpose is fulfilled. Thus the right to parent is more than words, more than legalities, and more than a fight to determine who will win. It is people wanting the right to nurture, raise, and protect their own children. As blind people we fight for the right to parent because often we hear about capable parents having their beautiful and loving children ripped away from their caring and stable homes.

However, I want to talk about the right to parent from my perspective. Full disclosure, this is a very painful and fragile story of part of my life. I still think I want to talk about it to let people know that often the subject of the right to parent comes up when a woman cannot bear a child for medical reasons. I have a hereditary mutation disorder called Marfan’s syndrome. Physicians believe that Abraham Lincoln had this disorder as well. I heard this every year during my physical exams from doctors in New York when I was a baby until today when I am fifty-five. This genetic mutation affects vision, the muscular/skeletal system, and heart rhythm. When a woman gets pregnant, her blood volume increases to twice the normal amount. Therefore the heart beats harder as the baby develops. So I was told by my cardiologist that, if I became pregnant, my heart could not take that much pumping and pressure. Somehow that did not register with me. My life plan was to have children, a husband, and the proverbial picket fence.

Marfan’s syndrome has affected my father’s side of my family and now through me my mother’s side as well. My father, grandfather, brother, and sister all were born with it. This disorder affects everyone differently. I lost both my father and sister when each of them was forty-seven. They both were hard workers and quite humble. He became ill and like most men would not seek health care. She needed a heart transplant, but her religious faith did not allow blood transfusions. I adored and still miss them. My brother and I are still healthy and thriving.

During my sister’s pregnancy she was advised not to complete the pregnancy. However, she decided to carry the baby to term. Unfortunately, she miscarried. My experience was drastically different, and to this day I still deal with the trauma. Unlike my sister, I was quite young and alone in a hospital room, preparing to face one of the most devastating procedures of my life. I often wonder why the medical advice I was given was so harsh and my sister’s was caring. Was it because I lived in the South and she was in the Midwest? Was it that I was younger, and she was older? Or was it that my physician lacked a good bedside manner? Whatever the case, we both had identical emotional distress. Both of us exhibited depression and grief that became indescribable. No one ever mentioned grief therapy. God knows that we needed it. I sometimes wonder still if there is a support group somewhere that I could attend. However, I think about it only when occurrences like this one are in the media today.

Moreover, my thoughts about what I went through have stirred that grief; perhaps writing in my acknowledgement of the forgotten population is my therapy. When I became pregnant, the doctors urged, frightened, and talked me into having an abortion. Even to this day the words send chills up my spine. I lay in that hospital bed with about eight doctors in white coats surrounding my bed, telling me “You will die,” or “The baby will die,” or “You both will die.” How could anyone survive that overwhelming sorrow? The words played in my head like a wind chime ringing over and over. The doctors were not apologetic; they showed me no sympathy; they left me alone to ponder a decision that I was unable to comprehend. In my mind this was a deliberate effort to get me to make a decision without anyone counseling me through the process. I explained that I wanted to speak with my grandmother before making a decision. They took that for an answer and kept repeating that I and my child would die. It was clear what they thought my answer should be. So my thought was that, if both my child and I will die, who can save us? No one was there for me at the time.

As I regretfully signed away my right to parent, I was devastated. My life plan had been to have children. This was the destruction of that hope. Even today I still grieve for my child. In my heart it was a girl. Even the father of my child believed that it was a girl. This experience was also a devastating, life-altering event for him. Often society gives more attention to women in abortion decisions. Yet men are often just as emotionally disturbed as women. He had many regrets: not being present, not having the ability to protect me, and not having a voice to speak on behalf of his child.

Before the procedure I cried, and I pleaded with my grandmother who was with me. She was loving and kind. However, she did not understand. Her words to me were, “Your sisters will have children.” I thought to myself, “My sisters will have children? How would that help me?” I grew very angry inside and wanted to retreat. The only things that worked in my favor were that I loved music, I was an athlete, and I had loving friends.

These friends that I speak of, one in particular, went through a lot with me. We were like spirits. The one was short; I was tall. She had a brown complexion; I was fair. She read Braille, and I read print. But we took the same medicine, we played piano duets together, and we even chose the same band instrument. The difference that I struggled with for about twenty years was that she was able to have children. She and I both took heart medication, and she survived her pregnancy. I often wondered, if I had been given the opportunity to parent, would I still be alive today. Although I don’t know what would have happened, I now have come to terms with the fact that I will never have that right.

The blessing in my life right now is my nieces and nephews. I had a hand in helping my sisters raise their children. The wonderful thing is that they are my children too. They have great memories of my taking them on trips, signing them up for community plays and neighborhood choirs, auditioning for commercials, and other events. Some of the activities that I introduced them to we laugh uproariously about today. This is a comfort to me. I guess this is what my grandmother meant: my sisters’ kids are my kids. They are loving to me. Often I need them, just as they need me.

The second blessing that I had later on in life was my two girls. My former husband and I wanted to have children, so we adopted. One of the young ladies--now they’re grown--had a visual impairment. She had a sister, so we took them both. Now I have two granddaughters and one grandson. I love them as much as if I had born them myself. Children are God’s gifts, but grandchildren are God’s angels blessing you in your older years. They are perfect grandchildren. They are funny, silly, and give great hugs and kisses.

So, when I hear all of the news on TV, radio, and more about abortion rights, when I think about the right to parent, even though I was not given this right, not because of a law or someone who thinks that women should have the right to make their own decisions, I am not sure if this is exactly what the fight is all about. Although It is a hard fight that people are struggling with, there are sides to take--I understand this. But in my mind children are beautiful, and I cannot fathom thinking of aborting any child when I wanted that opportunity so badly. I do believe when we say that we will see our loved ones again, I hope so, because I have been praying for such a reunion.

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# **The National Federation of the Blind of Ohio Scholarship Program 2022-2023by Jordy Stringer**

Editor’s note: Jordy chairs the NFB of Ohio’s Scholarship Committee. Here is his important announcement:

We are excited to share information about the NFBO Scholarship program during the up-coming 2022-2023 academic year. As you may know, the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio awards three scholarships each year in memory of individuals who have made significant contributions in the history of our affiliate. Most notable during this upcoming cycle is that the monetary amounts of each award have been increased. Below you will find the award descriptions along with their new amounts.

To apply, students can find this year's application link at nfbohio.org,

Or they may use the direct link: https://forms.gle/ohcWFzXAh1r5jbin7. Application deadline is Monday, May 30, 2022.

Scholarships:

 •$2500 Jennica Ferguson Memorial Scholarship: This scholarship is named for a young woman whose intelligence and leadership embodied the spirit of the National Federation of the Blind. In her far too short life of eighteen years, Jennica did not allow her blindness to hold her back.

 •$2000 Robert Eschbach Scholarship: Robert Eschbach served as NFB-Ohio president for eleven years and devoted his life of 80 years to changing what it means to be blind.

 •$1500 Barbara E. Fohl Memorial Scholarship: Barbara Fohl was a long-time leader of the NFB of Ohio, who gave selflessly to further its goals.

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# **Aira Once Again Available for the Ohio State Fairby Eric Duffy**

Editor’s note: Here is an exciting notice from Eric Duffy about this year’s state fair:

Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities and the Ohio State Fair are again partnering to make the Fair more inclusive for the blind. Aira is a visual interpreting service with well-trained agents available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Ordinarily, Aira Explorers purchase a monthly subscription to use the service, but there is no cost to individuals who use Aira during the Ohio State Fair, which runs July 27 to August 7, 2022.

Aira was first available for the 2019 Ohio State Fair. I have attended the Fair since I was a child. As an adult I had gone to the Fair by myself when no one else was available to go with me. I took my boys when they were young. Shelbi and I have gone together, and all of this without visual assistance. These times were enjoyable, but using Aira during the 2019 fair was a liberating experience. I traveled around the grounds faster and avoided crowds more easily. I had complete access to visual information. Aira agents could find information about scheduled events on the Fair's website. They could also access a map of the fairgrounds and help me find my destination. Aira made it easy to identify what was offered at the booths and exhibit areas.

Although I have gone to the Fair for many years without visual assistance and done what I have wanted to do, I look forward to using Aira during the 2022 Ohio State Fair. You must have a smartphone, download the Aira app, and create a free account to use Aira. You would do well to purchase a harness or a pouch for your phone to use Aira hands-free. During the Fair the entire grounds will provide a free access point. Come to the Ohio State Fair in 2022. Use Aira, and experience the Fair like never before. I want to thank OOD Director Kevin Miller and State Fair General Manager Virgil Strickler personally for creating a more inclusive Ohio State Fair.

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# **Ohioans Featured in the Community Service Division National Newsletter**

Editor’s note: Ohioan Maggie Stringer edits the national newsletter for the Community Service Division. This is an article that recently appeared in its pages. Here it is:

**A Take-Down You Won’t See Coming
National Athletic Training Month
Asia Quinones-Evans**

For sports fans sports are the epitome of hard work and dedication. To get to the pinnacle of their sport, even the most naturally gifted athletes have to give it their all. It is our honor to introduce to our readers Miss Asia Quinones-Evans:

I am blind, but I was not born blind. I had 20/20 vision until the world suddenly went black eight years ago, in September of 2014 when it was discovered that a brain tumor was compressing my optic nerve, causing 100% vision loss in less than a week. I had sight throughout my life until the month prior to turning seventeen, meaning I had no visual impairment experience nor the need to learn the skills. It was never in my plans to go to college; however, after gaining a significant number of blindness skills, I decided to be a first-generation college student in my family by enrolling at Lorain County Community College to pursue two Associates of Applied Sciences degrees in Sports and Fitness Management and Coaching and Promotion. It has not been an easy transition from attending classes in person to everything shutting down and going virtual due to the COVID - 19 pandemic throughout 2020 and 2021, but things are getting better and slowly transitioning back to in-person.

I chose these majors because I wrestled six years and developed a great passion for the sport. When I wrestled at the Ohio State School for the Blind, I had a blind coach, and this motivated me to learn more about becoming a wrestling coach. It is not usually a requirement to have a degree to become a wrestling coach unless someone wants to coach a college team. But I was very motivated to learn more about how to provide for my athletes. I wanted to learn about how they can do such a demanding sport and mitigate getting injuries.

This path is not typical for a blind person due to many challenges. I have a background in sports, so this makes it somewhat easier. After I went blind, I was told by my athletic director that I could not wrestle due to risk of injury. I had many bruises, busted lips, and even bruised bones from wrestling with sight. As a female wrestler this is even more difficult. I did not understand why I could not wrestle without sight when I never complained with getting injured being a smaller female. Wrestling is one of the easiest sports to adapt for the blind because all that must be done is to keep constant contact while in a match or practice. The referee is responsible for ensuring that this rule is enforced while a blind wrestler is in the match.

I do know that, when I continue to look for positions, I will come across the same inability to understand that a blind person can be a coach for such a demanding sport.

I am involved in my community by assisting to coach a youth wrestling team in my local area. I work with the athletes more individually when they need help. I am a part of several divisions of the NFB of Ohio. I am the Treasurer of my local chapter, the Treasurer of the Ohio Association of Blind Students, the Secretary of the Ohio Communities of Faith, and a Board member of the Ohio Association of Guide Dog Users.

Asia is living her life as a champion. "It is not the size of a woman, but the size of her heart that matters." Celebrate Blind Athletes

**A Pillar of Perseverance
National Cerebral Palsy Awareness Month
by Eric Duffy**

March is Cerebral Palsy Awareness Month, which gives us the opportunity to celebrate and educate others about cerebral palsy. We immediately thought of Eric Duffy of Kettering, Ohio, a man who has dedicated most of his life to educating the world that his blindness and CP are not the characteristics that define him or his future. Eric is a proud father of two sons and is a dynamic leader within our Federation and on Capitol Hill. We are proud to have him share a part of his story with us:

Cerebral palsy (CP) is a group of disorders that affect a person's ability to move and maintain balance and posture. CP is the most common motor disability in childhood. The CDC estimates that an average of 1 in 345 children in the U.S. has CP.

I am the only one in my immediate family with a disability. CP and blindness were not anything my parents were familiar with but something they had to learn about very quickly. My mom always told the story of how people in my family often carried me because I was blind, and therefore they weren't aware of my struggles with walking and balance for a while after I was born.

When most kids my age were starting school, I was having surgeries on my legs. I don't remember the exact ages when I had the surgeries, but I remember being in the hospitals having casts and doing physical therapy.

I have always fallen fairly frequently, and that is something I remember from an early age. Although, when I was young, I didn't know much about CP, I knew that I would not be able to walk, run, jump, and do other things in the same way other kids did. In my early days at the Ohio State School for the Blind, I made a conscious effort to build my upper body strength. I did pushups, pullups, isometrics, and anything else I could think of. No one prompted me to do this. But this upper body strength came in handy during the rough and tumble of boyhood and later as a wrestler. I completed all of my Physical Education requirements, although I could have gotten an exemption. In addition to that, I did physical therapy while at school and on Saturdays when at home.

I had the last surgery on my legs at the age of 14. I missed several months of my seventh-grade year, but, when I came back to school, I wanted to try out for the wrestling team. I was not permitted to wrestle that year, but the following year I made the team. I was not particularly good, because wrestling does require a lot of leg strength.

Other than in those early years of my life, CP has not been something I've thought about very much. I do the things that I want to do, and it does not slow me down. When I am traveling outside, it literally does slow me down, and it does help me to walk with someone for balance. Now I tend to walk with others more than I used to, because I am getting older and falls are harder on the body.

I have never been treated differently in the Federation because of my CP. Those who know I have it have all been very supportive. Over the years I have had the opportunity to talk with many parents of blind children who also have CP, and I hope that I have been able to help these children and their families.

Cerebral Palsy Awareness "Leadership is not about titles, positions, or flow charts. It is about one life influencing another."

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# **Buckeye Briefs**

The Cleveland Chapter writes to tell us that their Father’s Day Benefit Drawing is now at 174 tickets sold. Get your tickets today. The funds raised will be spent to help chapter members get to New Orleans for the national convention July 5 through 10. Here is how the drawing will work:

 A label will be generated with name, phone number, and address for every $10 contribution made. All labels will be placed in a barrel for the Father’s Day Benefit Drawing. You can enter as many times as you like. The drawing will take place on Father’s Day just in time for the convention. You can buy tickets until June 10. You can mail checks payable to NFB of Cleveland to Treasurer Natassha Ricks, 6980 Ladd Lane, Maple Heights, Ohio 44137, or login to our Ohio affiliate, www.NFBOHIO.ORG and click the donations button. Make sure you designate your donation to the Cleveland Chapter Benefit Drawing. Be sure to include your name, address, phone number, and the number of entries you want. You can make an electronic payment using Zelle or PayPal to treasurer@nfbohio.org; make sure you designate your donation for the Cleveland chapter Father’s Day Benefit Drawing. Note: If you buy more than one entry label, you can win more than once. Half the money raised will go to the chapter to help members get to convention. The other half will be divided among three winners. The second prize will be $25 less than the first prize, and the third prize will be $25 less than the second. Note, $5 of each $10 contribution can be taken as a charitable donation. If you have questions or need confirmation of the winners, contact Wilbert Turner at 216-561-6864; leave your name and phone number.

The Lorain County Chapter conducted elections in January. Elected were president, Sherry Ruth; vice president, Barbara Pierce; secretary, Bob Pierce; and treasurer, Asia Quinons-Evans.

We recently received this note from state board member and Ohio student Kinshuk Tella:

As many of you know, I am now on my third year of college, where I am working on degrees in environmental science and geology. You also may know that the summer between a student’s junior and senior years is one that is best filled with experiences that can lead to the start of one’s career. After my internship experience last summer in San Diego working for an aerospace company, I was eager to find something that was just as exciting for me, or even more. I had spent the past few months filling out countless applications and doing many interviews that lead to defeating rejection. But, after many rounds of nerve-racking interviews, I am now beyond excited to share with all of you that I was very recently offered and have accepted a three-month summer internship at Tesla, in Fremont, California. I will be working as an Environmental Engineering Intern under the air quality program within the Environment, Health, Safety, and Security Department. This is a dream opportunity that I am extremely grateful for. But I am even more grateful for the people and experiences that have given me the tools to achieve.

Upon reflecting during these past few days, it is evident that our organization, the National Federation of the Blind, has had a major impact on my ability to persist and strive for what I want in life. I can for certain say that the NFB has given me the confidence to seek opportunities and to know that blind people can live successful, meaningful lives. This philosophy is one that has changed my life, and my passion for these values is what fuels my involvement in this organization. It is amazing that we now live in a time where the leading electric vehicle company in the world is willing to hire a diverse team, including blind individuals. It is no secret that part of this is a result of the work of the NFB, but there is still much more work to do. I am confident and hopeful that world-leading companies like Tesla continue to give our community the chances to prove what we are capable of. We can live the life we want

Congratulations to the 2022-23 Board of Directors of the NFB of Cincinnati. Elected at the Saturday, November 20, 2021, meeting were president, Gloria Robinson; vice president, Marianne Denning; treasurer, Emily Pennington; secretary, Christopher Sabine; and at-large board members, Dave Perry, Gary Warren, and Chris Windham. We wish our new board members well as we move forward into the new year. Let's go build the Federation in Greater Cincinnati.

**Duffy Family Updates:**

For some time now I have been asked about the health of my son Lucas following the car accident he had in early February in which He broke his femur. He has been back at work since late April. As I write this, I just learned that the doctor has told him that he is behind in healing. If the leg has not made significant progress in the next month or two, they will perform another surgery to replace the hardware in his leg. Your prayers, thoughts, and concern continue to be very much appreciated. I am now the proud grandfather of Lucy Jane Duffy, who was born on Friday, May 13, 2022. At birth she weighed seven pounds four ounces and was twenty and a half inches long. Her parents John and Kendall Duffy are quickly adjusting to being new parents, and all are doing well.

The Braille Enrichment for Literacy and Learning Program will once again be held in-person on the campus of the Ohio State School for the Blind. This year the Program will run from Sunday, August 7, through Friday, August 12. We need your help. We need volunteers to work in the program. We need you to help spread the word about the program to parents and teachers of blind children. Finally we need your financial support. Please do what you can to raise money so that we can have the food and supplies we need for the program. If you have questions about how you can help, please contact me as soon as possible.

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# **Activities Calendar**

Every Thursday at 7, Community Service happy hour, Ohio Zoom room

May 30, deadline, NFB-O scholarship applications

May 31, Convention registration deadline

June 1, Presidential Release live

June 6, Deadline for submitting national resolutions

July 5-10, NFB national convention, New Orleans, Louisiana

August 7-12, Ohio BELL Program

September 17, In-person board meeting, DoubleTree Cleveland, Independence, Ohio

September 30, Deadline for submitting Gavel Award reports and award nominations

October, Blind Equality Achievement Month

October 15, White Cane Awareness Day

November 4-6, NFB-O Convention, DoubleTree Cleveland, Independence, Ohio