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National Accreditation Council
for Blind and Low Vision Services

November 19, 2014

Honorable Governor Rick Scott
The Capitol
400 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

Re: Denial of Blind Voters Rights

Dear Governor Scott:

I am sure by now you have been made aware of the problems encountered by some blind voters in Palm Beach County on Election Day, November 4, 2014. As President of the Board of Directors of the Florida Outreach Center for the Blind (FOCB), located in Palm Beach County, I would like to add my voice of concern to those from which you may have already heard. But my concern goes beyond what happened that particular Tuesday. My concern is for the many barriers faced on a daily basis by persons who are visually impaired or blind. What happened on election Tuesday merely provided an opportunity to make the public and elected officials aware of this. You see, persons who are visually impaired or blind are not disabled due to their lack of vision; they are disabled by the lack of vision of the sighted community to see them as the intelligent, hard-working, fully functional citizens they are or can be with just a little effort and respect.

With a little effort and respect, they would not be faced with broken down voting machines, inadequately trained poll workers or be asked to give up their right to vote independently and accept assistance instead. Would you accept that? Would any sighted person accept being told the voting machines don't work or that they must allow someone else to fill out their ballot? Could you conduct your life that way?

It is not just in voting that barriers are set. In many counties, transportation is either not available or is inadequate. But with a little effort and a little respect, it can be provided. Palm Beach County is a good example. PalmTran Connection makes public transportation available on a door-to-door basis at a reasonable fee nearly anywhere in the county. That means persons who are blind, visually impaired or possessing other qualifying disabilities can have a dependable means of going to work or arranging appointments. Elected officials at every level should do what they can to support these services and see that they are adequately funded.

Then there is education. Organizations like ours educate persons who are visually impaired or blind on how to lead their lives independently and to be prepared for the work place. We teach independent living skills, mobility skills, how to read and write in Braille, how to use computers, cell phones and I-phones. We don't charge for our services any more than a public school would. But where is the public funding? The Division of Blind Services, under the Department of Education provides such funding to the degree it can. But their funding

reaches only hundreds across the state when there are thousands that could benefit. Every elected official talks about the importance of jobs and the link between education and jobs. In our case, we could do so much more if additional funds were made available. Education and jobs enable persons who are visually impaired or blind. The lack of jobs disables them. Education + jobs = buying consumers and taxpayers. No education + no jobs = a burden on society.

The public exposure provided by the voting incidents in Palm Beach County should serve as a wakeup call to all officials. I ask that you take advantage of this opportunity. I am sure the problems with voting are not limited to Palm Beach County. I ask that you protect the voting rights of the visually impaired and blind by requiring all counties to make voting machines for the disabled available now and to keep them in working order. I also ask you to help change the perception that the visually impaired and blind are disabled by enabling them through your support of increasing the funding of education and readily available transportation to the fullest. You have often made the case that education is an investment. It's time to back up those words with your support.

By the way, I am sighted. But I have worked for four years beside our Executive Director, Carolyn Lapp, who is not sighted and has not been for forty years. Mrs. Lapp founded our Center and has operated it for more than ten years. She is an administrator, instructor and supervisor of our visually impaired staff. I do not assist her. She doesn't need my assistance. But I learn from her every day. I am one of the sighted directors on a board that must be at least 50% visually impaired or blind. She is an example of what independence and education can do. At our Center, we not only provide education, we provide jobs. Please help unlock these opportunities for others by your support, so they can help keep our economy growing.

Sincerely,



Frank Seidman,
Board President

Cc:

Senator William Nelson
Senator Marco Rubio
Representative Patrick Murphy
State Senator Joseph Abruzzo
State Representative Patrick J. Rooney, Jr.
Susan Bucher, Supervisor of Elections, Palm Beach County
Robert Lee Doyle III, Director, Division of Blind Services
Bobbi Howard, District Administrator, Division of Blind Services
Shelley Vana, Mayor, Palm Beach County Commission
Palm Tran Connection
Tim Burke, Publisher, The Palm Beach Post
Carolyn Lapp, FOCB Executive Director