# National Federation of the Blind of Michigan

# The Informant 2023

**Vol. 1:** Introductions and Invitations

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## From the President:

Terrific Tuesday Friends and Family,

It is exciting to know that we are getting closer to our annual family reunion, and it is only right that I swing through to introduce some new additions to our state affiliate work and presence. After conversing with our wonderful chapter and division presidents over the past two months, I have been made aware of the interest of our members in some of the work our state committees and programs are accomplishing. Thus, I am happy to introduce the first issue of our NFB of Michigan monthly newsletter, “The Informant.” This newsletter, arriving directly from my desk to your inbox, can provide important updates, meeting reminders and criteria for programs that affect blind people throughout the state. This service is informational, but also invitational, because we are always stronger when we are working together. Let’s begin by recognizing some

important announcements:

## Affiliate Announcements

• The leadership and membership of the former Kalamazoo chapter of the

National Federation of the Blind of Michigan must be recognized for their advocacy efforts over the past three years. During the pandemic and statewide shutdown of higher education institutions, the chapter actively advocated for nonvisual accessibility in a multitude of areas due to Western Michigan University’s shift to the virtual learning landscape. The chapter’s advocacy between 2020 and 2022 culminated in the creation of a written letter to the university’s provost, dean and office of diversity, equity, and inclusion after conversations with the Disability Student Services (DSS) office did not see movement. As a result of this next step of advocacy, I have been contacted by WMU’s DSS office informing me that beginning May 8, the university will begin geofencing and will be officially an Aira Exploration location in September 2023. All registered blind WMU students will have unlimited explorer access while living or commuting on campus, with an accommodation option for monthly explorer minutes for independent study after registration and a meeting with their office. A special congratulations to our members that are still members of the affiliate or students at WMU for their hard work, including: Victor Marques, Osman Koroma, and Monet Payne.; as well as a recognition for former MIABS student division members Lisa Irving, Michelle Jiminez, Rachel Pavone and Taylor Arndt. WMU remains the largest concentration of blind students in higher education within the state of Michigan and having an additional tool like Aira available has the potential to maximize their chances at success.

• The NFB of Michigan’s fundraising committee is excited for its

continued discussions about upcoming projects, including the work performed at our annual national convention’s exhibit hall. As we are approaching the time for decisions to be made on what items will be offered in Houston as a part of our table, please take some time to converse with our fundraising committee chair, Mark Eagle, at the next fundraising committee call, where he and the exhibit hall coordinator, Athere Jammoa, will be brainstorming ways to continue to make our presence in the hall a success! To learn about the fundraising committee or to get involved, please contact Mark directly at [treasurer@nfbmi.org](mailto:treasurer@nfbmi.org).

• The affiliate membership committee has been hard at work ensuring

that all members are listed in our national database. The National Federation of the Blind is a family that holds over six thousand blind people nationwide, with various programs and opportunities for members. This membership, however, has a criterion, including that members, chapters and divisions must be compliant in submitting their registration information to our national database. To do this, each local chapter and division is required to select one member to serve as the membership coordinator for their chapter/division. This member is expected to attend the monthly membership calls that the affiliate holds, as well as communicate changes in membership with the state membership chair, Michael Powell. For more information about how to join the committee, please attend the membership committee scheduled for June 14 or contact Mike directly for ways to begin connecting your chapter/division.

• The NFB of Michigan Youth and Family Committee is excited for the

momentum being built with the “Raising Expectations, Accessing Life (R. E. A. L.)” program, which is live and open for registration. Thus far, the committee has been in overdrive for marketing this program, which takes place June 23-25, 2023, in the city of Flint. As a reminder, the NFBMI REAL program is a collaborative weekend experience, where blind youth (ages 8-13) take part in the NFB STEM2U track, a STEM curriculum that gives the kiddos a chance to create nonvisual science experiments themed around space. High school, college, and transition-aged students (ages fourteen and above) will participate in our NFBMI Scholars track, which includes academic exploration, advocacy exercises, and professional development seminars. All attendees can take part in our social experiences this weekend, including participation in our 2023 Blind Bowlers Challenge on June 23, our NFBMI Flint-Genesee Gala on June 24 and our NFBMI REAL Career Fair on June 25. This past weekend, dedicated members of the NFBMI Youth and Family Committee supported the program’s success by marketing it at our vendor table in Kalamazoo at the 2023 Michigan Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (MAER) conference. Thanks to generous donations, families interested in the STEM2U program are eligible for our scholarship program, making the cost of attendance for them $25. NFBMI REAL is also a program sponsored by the Bureau of Services for Blind Persons (BSBP). If you are a student and are interested in attending, please provide your counselor with the attached flyer, indicate your interest in attending and register using this link by May 15:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeUgZJv6RUIl7QXmF3wGWH7-krQaV5E6vlgT4ak_CjEnLp7kg/viewform>

• The NFB of Michigan’s Communications Committee could use your help!

Our members continue to increase and grow, with a consistent need from chapter presidents being information about our programs and events.

What if I told you all that YOU are the key to getting the word out?

Our affiliate has five active chapters and one active division, but members all over the state can benefit from our programs, events, and services. By joining the communications committee, you can assist the affiliate in disseminating valuable information to our members, even choosing how you best do this. Some members thrive using our NFB email lists, while others move efficiently on social media. Regardless of your preference, our communications committee has a space for you. To learn more about our communications committee and how you can join up, please reach out to Rachel Newland, state secretary, at [secretary@nfbmi.org](mailto:secretary@nfbmi.org).

• The National Federation of the Blind of Michigan recognizes that

April 15 marked the close of some of our seminal national programs:

the NFB National Scholarship and the Kenneth Jernigan Award. Both programs, intended to support first-time convention attendees and students in their respective goals, do so much to support members of this affiliate, both current and former. I am excited to announce that our affiliate had a total of ten applicants for our national scholarship program and nine applicants for the Kenneth Jernigan Award. We wish all our applicant’s luck in the deliberation process as the respective committees consider the applications.

• The NFB of Michigan recognizes the tradition of supporting our

members in their convention attendance in past years. The convention of the National Federation of the Blind is the supreme authority of the organization, as outlined in our model constitution and all affiliate constitutions. To sustain and promote active membership, the NFB of Michigan will continue to offer support to members interested in attending our national convention. The process for this support, however, will look a bit different from years prior. Our state leadership is invested in making sure that our members get assistance at conventions, but also get the most out of our programming. With a general session, seminar day, resolutions, all the delicious dining options, and entertainment; the choices can be overwhelming. To request support from the National Federation of the Blind of Michigan, members are encouraged to write a letter to the affiliate board. In this official request, members should outline the amount of support requested, their interest or intentions while in Houston and the work of the Federation you have participated in since our 2022 convention in New Orleans. Remember, you are considered an ACTIVE member of the Federation if you are a dues-paying member of a chapter or division, your chapter/division has submitted their dues to the state affiliate for 2023 and your chapter/division president can verify your membership after you have requested support. All members interested in requesting assistance for convention should submit this letter to [convention@nfbmi.org](mailto:convention@nfbmi.org) on or before May 15, 2023, for a response, after which an interview with members of the board will be held.

I know that this is a lot of information, and I am so happy that you are all invested in the continued growth of our affiliate. If you have questions about the updates provided, I am always able to be reached via email at [President@nfbmi.org](mailto:President@nfbmi.org). We know that the changes occurring in our affiliate are large in scale, but they all come from similar

beginnings: the love, hope and determination of our members and leaders to turn dreams into reality. Let’s go build the Federation!