February 3, 2014

President Barack Obama

The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.

Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

In your January 28th State of the Union Address, and via a conference call with Vice President Biden and Secretary of Labor Perez on January 29th, it was announced that all contractors would be required by executive order to pay their federally funded workers at least $10.10 an hour under any new contracts. The National Federation of the Blind, the oldest and largest nationwide organization of blind Americans, urges you to include workers with disabilities in this executive order, affirmatively and explicitly. We further urge you to announce that you will sign the Fair Wages for Workers with Disabilities Act (H.R. 831) if and when that legislation reaches your desk. With a Republican sponsor and substantial Democratic co-sponsorship, this nonpartisan piece of legislation will responsibly phase out the discriminatory practice of paying workers with disabilities less than the minimum wage.

Our respect and prayers go out to Americans like Sergeant First Class Cory Remsburg, who are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for the freedom and equality we seek to enjoy as American citizens. We are thankful that Sergeant Remsburg is recovering from the wounds he suffered in service to this great nation. But we must point out that his value to our society is not a function of the restoration of his eyesight and ability to walk, but of the simple fact that he is a human being with determination, belief in himself, love for the United States, and aspirations for his future. There are millions of others who actively seek to serve this nation we love with our unique talents and strengths, whether or not we can benefit from technology or medical intervention that will mitigate or eliminate our disabilities. Some of us may be blind in both eyes; others may not be able to hear; some may be unable to walk; some may have developmental disabilities that require innovative interventions; and still others may have other disabilities that require them to perform everyday tasks a little differently. We seek to have our different characteristics embraced as respected contributions to our nation’s diversity, not as badges of inferiority that condemn us to a life of low wages and low expectations. We are no less valuable, we are no less capable, and we are no less American than any other citizen.

We wholeheartedly agree with you when you say, “The America we want for our kids – a rising America where honest work is plentiful and communities are strong; where prosperity is widely shared and opportunity for all lets us go as far as our dreams and toil will take us – none of it is easy. But if we work together; if we summon what is best in us, the way Cory summoned what is best in him, with our feet planted firmly in today but our eyes cast towards tomorrow – I know it’s within our reach.” We believe that this America includes people with disabilities, and we ask you to demonstrate that you believe it as well.

Sincerely,


Marc Maurer, President
NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND

cc: Vice President Joseph R. Biden

 The Honorable Thomas E. Perez