



August 24, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

RE: Establishment of an Interagency Coordinating Council on Blindness

Dear Mister President:

Throughout recent American history, a myriad of programs and supports have been put into place by the Federal Government, which promote greater productivity and self-sufficiency for this Nation's blind. Yet, various related initiatives remain uncoordinated, thereby resulting in either unnecessary overlap or duplication, limiting the extent to which a more seamless system would promote independence and self-sufficiency.

While it would be ideal to establish a centralized federal governmental body that unites different programs and services for the blind under one umbrella, in light of the absence of a collective political willingness for Congress to turn such a vision into reality, we realize this could prove difficult. A more immediate and attainable goal would be to create an interagency apparatus that may facilitate an unprecedented level of cooperation without the need to undertake major organizational realignment. We could call this the Interagency Coordinating Council on Blindness (ICCB). That body could serve as the central coordinating apparatus under which programs and services for the blind across the Federal Government are coordinated in order to enhance efficiency and improve policy development and program and service delivery, and could be created through executive order.

The focus of the ICCB would be in five key areas:

- Support of educational initiatives in preschool, elementary, secondary and post-secondary settings.
- Economic self-sufficiency through employment and entrepreneurship.
- Physical accessibility of the built environment, programmatic accessibility of services and supports, innovation of assistive technology, and web accessibility.
- Coordination of government benefits including healthcare, housing, and other supports for economically disadvantaged populations.
- Research, statistics, and data collection designed to identify emerging and best practices within an environment of continual innovation.

The ICCB would be led by Federal Government agency heads as well as members of the general public who bring specific expertise, including from leading influential consumer and allied organizations in the blindness field and lived experiences of notable personal and professional success. All ICCB members would be appointed by the President, and staff would consist of an executive director and support personnel. Excluding the executive director, staff could be detailed from within federal agencies across the executive branch. Individuals who are blind experience a unique set of barriers in society and in accessing government services due to low expectations and systems that are not built to include nonvisual access. By bringing together the relevant experts in government and the blindness community, our nation will better support and benefit from the talents of this diverse range of Americans who happen to be blind

Examples of executive orders creating such agencies already exist, and may provide guidance and serve as precedents. Specifically, EO 13330, establishing the Interagency Coordinating Council on Human Service Transportation, and EO 13347, establishing the Inter-Agency Coordinating Council on Individuals with Disabilities and Emergency Preparedness. Both councils feature appointment of cabinet secretaries and other agency heads, and both incorporate involvement by career staff. This allows the political leaders to set the overall direction and staff from the partner agencies to carry out tasks.

The Interagency Coordinating Council on Blindness would be a great benefit to the blind of this nation, and serve as only interagency coordinating council dedicated solely to blindness. I urge you to instigate the creation of this new council. The National Federation of the Blind stands ready to help in any way that we can.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark A. Riccobono", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Mark A. Riccobono, President  
National Federation of the Blind