

NDAB Resolution 2021-01:
State 2021-2023 Biennial Appropriation for North Dakota Vision Services / School for the Blind (NDVS/SB)

Whereas, statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau in 2019 estimated that there were 762,062 residents living in North Dakota. Conservative Demographic studies consistently demonstrate that **3.3%** among the general population have medical conditions which mildly, moderately, or severely compromise their eyesight, this means that approximately 20,000 or so individuals in North Dakota are affected by uncorrectable sight loss - 5,000 of whom have significant sight loss and/or are “legally blind”; and,

Whereas, the loss of eyesight is a major life-altering disability that requires specialized and specific rehabilitation skills training to help people of any age cope with this condition; and,

Whereas, North Dakota Vision Services / School for the Blind in Grand Forks has the components for a comprehensive center-based rehabilitation training program, is recognized regionally and nationally as a program that is of excellence and high quality, has the capability and capacity that allows it to serve people of all ages (i.e., has both children and adult oriented training programs); and,

Whereas, children and adults with sight loss, who receive a regimen of specific, comprehensive, intensive center-based blindness skills training, such as that which is available at NDVS/SB, are employable and are capable of functioning with a high degree of independence; and,

Whereas, during the current 2019-2021 biennium, NDVS/SB has had to reduce its budget by 5% as requested by the Governor which was accomplished through temporarily not filling 1.5 positions and delaying many necessary expenditures, the primary impact of these reductions has been the inability to place a certified mobility specialist in western North Dakota as had been planned during this biennium: and,

Whereas, to request even more reductions of this critically important educational program for children and adults with blindness, will undoubtedly further erode the capacity and availability of existing services,

Now, therefore, be it resolved by the Board of North Dakota Association of the Blind at its meeting on this date of Sunday, January 10th, 2021 that we strongly urge the Governor and the 67th North Dakota Legislative Assembly that will convene on January 5, 2021 to maintain and increase the appropriation for North Dakota Vision Services / School for the Blind (HB1013) in the state budget which is adopted for the 2021 -2023 biennium so that the NDVS/SB appropriation will,

- Restore funding to maintain a vision professional (preferably a mobility specialist) in western North Dakota to ensure all residents are served with enough frequency and intensity that they can make steady progress toward mobility independence.
- Maintain funding that will allow NDVS/SB to purchase and demonstrate rapidly evolving assistive technology at a high priority level to establish and maintain a state-of-the-art technology demonstration and training center as falling behind on training programs will result in lower productivity and employability.
- Maintain funding for outreach travel within the state and for professional development of staff at regional and national training conferences.