



PERISCOPE

**A Quarterly Newsletter sponsored by the
Mississippi Council of the Blind, Inc.
Spring, 2021**

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Tax deductible contributions may be sent to:
MS Council of the Blind
P O Box 31112

Jackson, MS 39286

Anyone wishing to remember the MS Council of the Blind in a last will and testament may do so by including a special paragraph for that purpose. If your wishes are complex, please contact MCB for clarification.

Contributions to the James Doyle Case Memorial Scholarship Fund or to the Carter Gable Memorial Technology Assistance Fund should be appropriately marked, and sent to the above address.

Phone MCB at 601-672-0973.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Hello, MCB members and friends. I know times remain tough for us. I hope everyone is staying safe and warm. As I am sure you know, the MCB Board continues to meet on a quarterly basis using our Zoom Platform. When we meet in March, 2021, we will discuss the possibility of meeting face to face for our 2021 state convention. At our January, 2021 meeting, we voted to possibly have our convention in October of this year--our hope is that we can accomplish this endeavor. I want to thank everyone for their patience and understanding.

I would like to encourage everyone to pay their 2021 dues; the time is fast approaching when we will need to send our ACB dues

to the national office. If you have already paid your dues, I thank you. If you are a member of a local chapter, just send your dues to the chapter treasurer; for example, if you are a member of Jackson, send your \$15 to Ken Maddox; his address is:

Ken Maddox
3448 Janet Street
Pearl, MS 39208

Remember, we host a Zoom community call on the fourth Thursday of each month at 6:15 PM, central time. All members are welcome to participate on this call. It is a way for us to stay in touch with one another.

Our committees are in place; for example, our technology committee meets on the second Thursday of each month to review applications and make recommendations. I want to thank all committee members for the effort they give for us.

Don't forget that ACB hosts several Zoom calls each week and participation is welcome; and, once again ACB will host its summer conference and convention on a virtual basis, with the dates being July 16, through July 23, 2021.

For those of you who enjoy the Readers Digest, the National Library Service now offers this magazine in Braille. Just call our library and sign up.

Let's continue to support one another during these difficult days. If you would like to talk with me, just give me a call at: 601-672-0973. Remember, it is not about me, it is about us!

Ralph Smitherman

MCB STATE BOARD HIGHLIGHTS

Submitted by Wanda Allen

The MCB State Board met on January 16, 2021 via zoom call. The roll was called and a quorum established. President Ralph Smitherman called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m. central time.

The Minutes from the September 19, 2020 meeting and the Treasurer's Report were accepted as distributed, followed by the Committee and Chapter reports that were also accepted and approved.

Recommendations were presented by the Chair of the Convention Committee, Eddie Turner. As the date of the Convention draws closer and it is time to sign the contract with the Holiday Inn in Pearl, he opened up discussion wondering if we need to postpone the convention until the pandemic is over or until vaccinations are given out or just how the board would like to proceed. After much discussion and not knowing restrictions, Jane Peets made a motion to postpone the date until later in the year, possibly October 2021. Kris McNair seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Unfinished Business: President Smitherman reported that the upcoming community conference call was scheduled for January 28th and that Dorothy Young agreed to participate in the call and give an update on MDRS.

The community calls are for anyone that would like to participate. The calls are set for the fourth Thursday of every month at 7:00 pm.

Ralph Smitherman also reported that all bills, etc. are up to date on the Storage facility.

New Business: Treasurer Rene Virden reported that her printer is dying and it needs to be replaced. She presented to the board that she is willing to go in half for a new one. Robert Thomas made a motion for MCB to purchase the printer outright for the Treasurer. Seconded by Terry Shelton, and with no other discussion the motion was approved and carried.

MCB Members: President Ralph Smitherman reported that there was an incentive made to get dues paid and forms mailed in early. The cash prize was donated by Eddie Turner, for the member that got their dues in by December 31, 2020. Rene Virden reported that there were 28 members that took advantage of the incentive and the names were placed in a box for the drawing. Showing everyone the box on zoom, Rene asked her husband Robert Virden to pull out the winning ticket. Mike Duke was the winner of the \$250 dollar cash prize. Congratulations, Mr. Duke.

The next State Board meeting was scheduled for Saturday, March 20, 2021 at 10:00 am central time via Zoom call.

ZOOM HELP AVAILABLE

By Alison Smitherman

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, Zoom has become a very popular communication tool within ACB and its local affiliates, for holding various meetings, social events and community

calls. Mississippi is no exception, as we have been holding monthly community calls and quarterly state board meetings via Zoom since the fall of 2020. I am concerned that, although we have had good participation among a few MCB members who have attended and participated in our monthly community calls, since we started using the Zoom platform so many more of our members have not participated in the calls.

If you are uncomfortable with the idea of using Zoom, Michael and I would like to offer our assistance to help you learn how to use Zoom and become more familiar with its features. We do not claim to be Zoom experts, but over the past several months we have both facilitated and hosted Zoom calls and would like to be of help to anyone who is interested in knowing more about Zoom and how to use it.

If you would like assistance from us on how to use Zoom, you can email us at amduo@bellsouth.net or give me a call at 601-331-8084. We have our own Zoom pro account and would be happy to set up a one-on-one Zoom practice session with you.

We believe there is a lot of potential for us in MCB to use Zoom to get us more connected in many ways as an organization, and we want everyone to enjoy using Zoom as much as we do!

NEED TECH HELP? WE CAN HELP!

Here are a couple of telephone numbers that people with disabilities can call for immediate assistance with computer or iOS device issues:

Microsoft Tech Support: 800-936-5900

Apple Accessibility Line: 877-204-3930

A NOTE OF SYMPATHY

We in MCB extend our deepest, heartfelt sympathy to the family and friends of longtime MCB member and friend, David Puckett of Tupelo. David passed away on Saturday, February 13, 2021, in Tupelo. He was a kind and caring individual with a servant's heart, as evidenced by the many civic and service organizations of which he was a member and served so faithfully, including MCB. David will be greatly missed!

NRTC RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS FOR ACCESS TECHNOLOGY STUDY

The NRTC is recruiting people with blindness or low vision (age 21+) who are working or interested in working to be part of a 5-year study about access technology (AT) use, particularly in the workplace. Some questions we will seek answers to are:

- What AT do you most commonly use?
- How do you decide whether to use a specific AT?
- What are your AT challenges?
- What AT do you need that isn't currently available?

We want to know YOUR thoughts and experiences! Participation will involve completing multiple surveys to help us determine how AT use is changing over time.

Why participate?

- You'll help identify gaps in AT – what is needed but not available, which our technology company partners, including Microsoft, Google, OrCam, Vispero, and Aira are interested in!
- Findings will allow us to make recommendations for AT users, VR professionals, AT specialists, and employers.
- You'll receive a small gift card after completing each survey and we will share study results with you.

Do you want to have your voice heard and help us with our 5-year study? Complete our [online pre-screening survey](#) or call 662-325-2001 to schedule an appointment for a telephone screening. Contact Michele McDonnall (m.mcdonnall@msstate.edu) or Emily Damm (edamm@colled.msstate.edu) with questions.

ALERT!

Submitted by Ralph Smitherman

Historic Bill Breaks Down Braille Barriers

In a surprise move early this morning, key leaders in the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives have reached bipartisan agreement on brand new landmark legislation requiring all sighted students across America to exclusively learn and use braille. The bill, entitled the Braille Literacy Is Necessary Knowledge (BLINK) Act, was only introduced late last evening in an attempt by the bill champions to thwart mobilized opposition by proponents of vision dependency. Under the BLINK Act, which somewhat radically makes trafficking in

printed text books and inaccessible electronic instructional materials a federal crime punishable by public humiliation on national network television, all U.S. sighted school children will be guaranteed issue of braille text books for every course offered in our nation's public school districts. Braille instruction for all sighted youngsters will be mandatory and begin in pre-K programs, with total immersion emergency braille instruction also being required immediately for all sighted students in the later grades.

Under provisions of the BLINK Act that have even some of the staunchest opponents of vision dependency concerned, all high stakes test takers, whether blind or sighted, will be required, beginning in 2021, to sit for such examinations in braille. Even as the BLINK Act moves along its apparent fast track toward passage, a variety of interest groups are already lining up to oppose it. Once enacted, the BLINK Act will mandate that schools must trade in SMART boards and flat-screen televisions to make room for the additional shelving space needed for braille texts. A representative of the National Association of Put-Upon Public School Facilities workers said: "Do these people in Congress know what they're doing? Here's yet another unfunded mandate that micro manages our public schools, and it's going to be us overworked and underpaid facilities guys who'll be the ones slaving away, evenings and weekends, to put up all this expensive new shelving for all those bumpy books."

But still other special interests see a silver lining. Many districts are expected to issue sighted students with oversized backpacks and roller bags to aid them in carrying their textbooks home and between classes. Lobbyists from the luggage and handtruck industries are rumored to be behind the striking bipartisanship that led to today's early morning accord.

“You know, these guys are so dumb, they think that braille has to be on paper,” said AFB's Director of Public Policy. “But hey, last time I tried describing to them what a refreshable braille display is, their eyes just rolled right up in their heads. Guess we gotta take our champions as we find ‘em.”

What has not as yet been completely hammered out in today's agreement is how students whose print dependence as a bona fide disability will be treated. A spokesperson for one advocacy group, Vision Dependent and Proud, said, “We're not sitting still for this blatant disregard for sighted students' civil rights. What's more, our kids are just plain helpless unless they're visually engaged. My son just goes to pieces when he's not transfixed by lots of graphics and moving pictures.”

Still, proponents of the BLINK Act say that no sighted student will be left behind. Under the bill, students whose reliance on vision cannot be corrected after extensive counseling or, in the most severe cases, light deprivation therapy, will have their unique learning needs met. Specially trained TSS's (Teachers of

Students with Sight) will be certified by state personnel preparation programs in order to prepare these sight-dependent students to hone their tactile skills and to prepare for success in an auditory, tactile world. However, critics of this approach say that such teacher preparation programs have never been funded adequately in the past.

Additionally, school districts will employ TSS's and printists who have been trained in the print alphabet and specialized rules of print production. Using software expressly designed for sighted users, such as Microsoft's print production tool, Word, the printists can hand-keyboard documents that may be needed for sighted students on a one-to-one basis. (Of course, classroom teachers will need to submit braille documents to the printists in advance to give them time to transcribe the braille into print.)

The BLINK Act does allow delivery of these makeshift printed materials up to 6 months after the braille versions are provided. Advances in tactile scanning technology, including TCR (Tactile Character Recognition) will enable some braille documents to be scanned and translated almost automatically into print, which can then be reproduced onto paper using a machine called a printer (similar to an embosser, but without the pleasant sound).

Rebecca Sheffield, AFB's senior Policy Researcher, is eager to see the BLINK Act implemented nationwide. In a telephone interview with AFB's Director, she asked, "Shouldn't we be

doing a full court press on this amazing bill, and call out the troops to contact Congress right away?” To which he replied, “April Fool!! April Fool!!”

Of course, there is no BLINK Act, but we hope you got a smile out of our irreverent take on policy process today.

EDITOR’S CORNER

Thanks to those of you who submitted articles for this issue of the Periscope. Without your contributions of articles, this newsletter would not be possible. Also, we appreciate the assistance of the staff and volunteers of Talking Book Services, who duplicate and mail the Periscope for us.

The deadline to submit articles for the Summer, 2021 issue of the Periscope is May 21, 2021.

Until next time, have a safe and enjoyable Spring season!

Warm regards,

Alison Smitherman
Editor