**RESOLUTION 2020-02**

**REGARDING PROMOTING SELF-EMPLOYMENT**

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE BLIND AND THOSE WITH LOW VISION**

WHEREAS, Despite the overall national unemployment rate being below 8%, the National Federation of the Blind, the nation’s largest organization of the blind, currently estimates that the unemployment rate of the blind is at approximately 70%; and

WHEREAS, it is estimated that approximately 30% of the blind live below the poverty line; and

WHEREAS, the unemployment rate for the blind and the percentage of the blind living below the poverty line has not been substantially lowered in decades; and

WHEREAS, despite technological advances, significant societal barriers remain that prevent many blind people from achieving full-time employment, particularly in rural areas; and

WHEREAS, even when full-time employment is achieved by a blind person, underemployment in the traditional employment market remains a significant problem; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. economy has been shifting from traditional employment to increased freelance and small business opportunities, and the United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that the number of Americans working as freelancers and small business owners will continue to increase to a point where by 2027 freelancers and small business owners will outnumber American workers in the traditional workforce; and

WHEREAS, the State of Ohio and Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities currently provide only limited support for blind people seeking self-employment, and do not provide any activities to educate Blind individuals on the advantages of self-employment; and

WHEREAS, with the proper resources and training, self-employment offers many opportunities in many different fields for the blind to earn significant income, and offers the opportunity to reduce the unemployment rate significantly among the blind: Now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio in convention assembled this 7th day of November, 2020, that this organization call upon the State of Ohio and specifically Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities to recognize and support self-employment as a viable opportunity for the blind; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio call upon the State of Ohio and Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities to develop and implement a training program designed to train blind and low vision individuals to pursue self-employment opportunities--at a minimum the program should include elements that assist the trainees to

1. Assess their skills and interests to determine their best path towards self-employment;

2. Develop the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to plan their self-employment ventures properly;

3. Develop the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary for managing their self-employment ventures once started;

4. Develop the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to market their products or services; and

5. Access any resources necessary for any continuing education necessary to maintain or improve their skills in their chosen fields in order to offer the best opportunity for self-employment success; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio call upon the State of Ohio and Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities to assist those who have completed the self-employment training program to obtain the financing, equipment, and other resources necessary to begin their self-employment ventures; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio call upon the State of Ohio and Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities to train their vocational rehabilitation counselors in ways to assist clients who wish to pursue self-employment opportunities and to find and obtain resources for furthering their self-employment ventures; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED That the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio call upon the state of Ohio and Ohioans with Disabilities to take all steps necessary, including developing appropriate funding sources, to implement the program called for in this resolution.