



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Blind Hoosiers File Lawsuit Against the Indiana Division of Family Resources
National Federation of the Blind Also Joins Litigation

Indianapolis (August 6, 2019): Reviewing and selecting insurance and benefits are important processes that should be personal and private. For Christopher and Sarah Meyer, siblings who are blind, the print-only benefits communications they received from the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA), its Division of Family Resources (DFR), and their contractors not only forced them to rely on other people to intercept and read their private information, but caused them to lose their benefits.

In a lawsuit filed today in federal district court in Indianapolis, Christopher and Sarah joined with the National Federation of the Blind to challenge the agencies' failure to communicate effectively with blind Hoosiers. They have asked FSSA, DFR, and their contractors to send notices and communications in Braille or electronically, rather than standard print, so that they can use text-to-speech screen readers to access their critical benefits information. Additionally, they notified state officials that the Internet portal that beneficiaries use to select benefits and update information is not accessible to the blind.

"State and federal agencies that administer government benefits and programs have been required to communicate effectively and accessibly with all current and potential beneficiaries for decades," said Mark Riccobono, President of the National Federation of the Blind. "Today, technology makes effective communication easier than ever, but agencies throughout the nation are still failing to meet this legal and moral obligation. The National Federation of the Blind is committed to fighting for blind people like Christopher and Sarah Meyer when state agencies flout the law."

Plaintiffs are represented by Indiana Disability Rights (IDR), Brown, Goldstein & Levy, LLP, and the Law Office of Jana Eisinger, PLLC.

According to Tom Crishon, Managing Attorney at IDR, "Indiana agencies are required to offer communications with blind people that are as effective as communications with others. The plaintiffs are simply asking DFR to provide correspondence regarding their benefits in a format that is accessible and necessary to afford them an equal opportunity to participate in the program. Despite repeated attempts to work with DFR to achieve a workable solution, the agency continually fails to effectively communicate with blind Hoosiers."

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About the National Federation of the Blind

The National Federation of the Blind (NFB), headquartered in Baltimore, is the oldest and largest nationwide organization of blind Americans. Founded in 1940, the NFB consists of affiliates, chapters, and divisions in the fifty states, Washington DC, and Puerto Rico. The NFB defends the rights of blind people of all ages and provides information and support to families with blind children, older Americans who are losing vision, and more. We believe in the hopes and dreams of blind people and work together to transform them into reality. Learn more about our many programs and initiatives at www.nfb.org.

About Indiana Disability Rights

Indiana Disability Rights (IDR) is the designated Protection and Advocacy (P&A) System and Client Assistance Program (CAP) for the State of Indiana. The mission of Indiana Disability Rights is to protect and promote the rights of individuals with disabilities through empowerment and advocacy. For more information, visit www.IndianaDisabilityRights.org.

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