



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **National Federation of the Blind and Disability Rights North Carolina Sue UNC Health Care and Nash UNC Health Care**

#### *Lawsuit Alleges Discrimination Against Blind Patients*

**Raleigh, North Carolina (December 3, 2018):** The UNC Health Care System, Nash UNC Health Care, and contractors systematically discriminate against blind patients in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Rehabilitation Act, and the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, according to a lawsuit filed today. The lawsuit, brought by the National Federation of the Blind and Disability Rights North Carolina along with individual blind plaintiffs, alleges that blind patients do not receive critical communications in alternate formats - such as Braille, large print, or electronic documents - only standard print. This causes financial and personal hardships for blind patients and does not allow them to keep their medical information private.

For instance, according to the lawsuit, Plaintiff John Bone is a blind patient who visited Nash General Hospital for emergency medical care services on two separate occasions. Each visit, he informed the hospital that he was blind and needed to receive all his medical bills in Braille. Mr. Bone instead received all the bills in print, and he did not know how much money he owed or even to whom he owed money until collection agencies pursued and threatened him. Mr. Bone seeks to receive medical bills in Braille, so he can pay his bills without accruing late fees, enduring harassment from creditors, and having his credit score needlessly damaged.

Another plaintiff named in the lawsuit visits a UNC Health Care provider at least once every six months and needs documents formatted in large print in order to read them. During his medical visits, he is forced to sign forms he cannot read and receives visit summaries, follow-up medical instructions, and bills all in standard print. This patient often must share personal medical information with third parties to understand and follow medical instructions. He seeks to keep his medical information private, which he can do if he receives documents in large print.

“Blind people need and deserve the same privacy and independence in managing our healthcare that sighted patients take for granted,” said Mark Riccobono, President of the National Federation of the Blind. “In some cases, the ability to receive information in formats we can use can make a life-or-death difference. With today’s technology, providing bills, medical records, and treatment instructions in alternative formats is readily achievable, and all providers have a moral and legal obligation to do so.”

“We are representing blind individuals in North Carolina because the failure to effectively communicate with them violates their legal rights, increases their chances of incurring fines and damaging their credit scores, disregards their need for independence and privacy, and puts their

very health at risk,” said Virginia Knowlton Marcus, Executive Director of Disability Rights NC, and “health care industries have the responsibility to know and do better.”

The plaintiffs are represented by the attorneys of Disability Rights NC and the Baltimore law firm of Brown, Goldstein & Levy LLP.

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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](http://www.nfb.org).

### **About Disability Rights North Carolina**

Disability Rights North Carolina is part of the federally mandated protection and advocacy system for people with disabilities and it is responsible for redressing incidents of disability discrimination throughout the state of North Carolina. Learn more about Disability Rights North Carolina at [www.disabilityrightsnc.org](http://www.disabilityrightsnc.org).

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