# Resolution 2022-02

## Regarding Funding From the General Assembly to Enhance the Viability of Colorado’s Business Enterprise Program

WHEREAS, in 1936, Congress passed the Randolph-Sheppard Act which created a program to foster entrepreneurship for the blind on government property; and

WHEREAS, in Colorado, the Randolph-Sheppard program, known as the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) for the blind, is today housed in the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) Blindness and Low Vision Services Unit (BLVS) within the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE); and

WHEREAS, business enterprise programs for the blind authorized by the Randolph-Sheppard Act and companion state statutes have historically been the most successful employment programs for the blind; and

WHEREAS, in 2016, the National Federation of the Blind of Colorado worked closely with the Colorado General Assembly and CDLE to secure the passage of HB16-1048 (sponsored by then-Representative Dianne Primavera), a law that was supposed to usher in a new era of expansion for Colorado’s Business Enterprise Program; and

WHEREAS, despite a much-ballyhooed listening tour and a series of strategic planning meetings between CDLE management and other state departments which were to benefit from the passage of HB16-1048, absolutely no new business opportunities have been procured by Colorado’s Business Enterprise Program since the passage of this law; and

WHEREAS, the crisis plaguing Colorado’s business enterprise program was made even worse by the onset of the global pandemic in 2020, which resulted in the closure of many of the Program’s blind-operated businesses and a dramatic loss of income to those businesses which still managed to operate; and

WHEREAS, over the 86 years during which the Randolph-Sheppard program has operated in the United States, changes in society, consumer habits, and bureaucratic inertia has resulted in a significant diminution of the program’s effectiveness, severely limiting entrepreneurial opportunities for the blind; and

WHEREAS, in Colorado, BEP is a program in crisis, and unemployment among the blind of Colorado continues at an unacceptably high level; and

WHEREAS, it is well worth noting that individual blind entrepreneurs hire other people with disabilities at a rate at least 3 times higher than that of other small businesses; and

WHEREAS, although BEP in Colorado is wholly funded by set aside fees (similar to franchise fees) from licensed blind entrepreneurs which are matched with federal dollars, these fees are hardly enough to support the kind of stabilization and expansion which BEP desperately requires if it is to reap the benefits intended by HB16-1048; and

WHEREAS, Colorado’s business enterprise program has never received an appropriation from the Colorado general assembly to operate: Now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED by the National Federation of the Blind of Colorado in convention assembled this 29th day of October, 2022, in the city of Greeley, Colorado, that this organization call upon the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment to work collaboratively with the National Federation of the Blind of Colorado and BEP operators to develop creative, meaningful, and effective solutions to address the state of crisis in which Colorado’s business enterprise program now finds itself; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this organization call upon the Colorado General Assembly to appropriate at least a half million dollars in support of Colorado’s business enterprise program to strengthen and expand the program, increase its viability, and create entrepreneurial opportunities for blind Coloradans.