

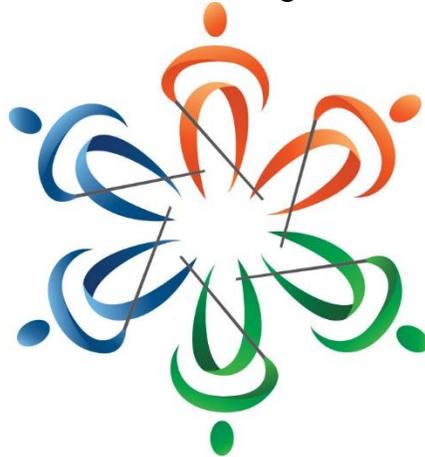
**NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND OF
Massachusetts**

**73rd Annual State Convention
March 27th-29th, 2026
The Crown Plaza Boston/Woburn
15 Middlesex Canal Park Dr.
Woburn, MA 01801**

Shara Winton, President

617-600-8130 Sharawinton@gmail.com

NFBMA Logo



**NATIONAL FEDERATION
OF THE BLIND**
MASSACHUSETTS

Live the life you want.

Description: Logo of the National Federation of the Blind of Massachusetts featuring a multicolored abstract emblem of whosit humans with white canes, forming a circular flower-like shape, with the text 'National Federation of the Blind Massachusetts and the tagline 'Live the life you want.'

Message from our Massachusetts President

Happy State Convention!

Greetings to our Federation family, friends, and attendees! The National Federation of the Blind of Massachusetts is thrilled to visit Woburn for another incredible convention. This year's gathering promises an enriching experience filled with dynamic sessions, insightful discussions, and exciting breakouts designed to empower and inspire. As the largest gathering of blind people, organized by BLIND people in Massachusetts, this convention offers invaluable resources and connections to support you in your academic, social, and vocational pursuits. I encourage you to take full advantage of these opportunities and build meaningful networks throughout the weekend.

Our theme this year, "**Empowerment through Advocacy**," is woven into every aspect of our programming. On Friday afternoon, our breakout sessions will highlight the essential skills that enable blind individuals to thrive. In his 2023 National Banquet Address, our national president, Mark Riccobono, called for a decisive break from the **Vision Industrial Complex**—a challenge that I now extend to you. I invite each of you, whether a longtime Federationist, guest, or first-time attendee, to embrace the mission of the Federation: securing equality, opportunity, and security for the blind.

By engaging in our breakout and general sessions, making your voice heard as a proud dues-paying member, and advocating alongside us, you become an active force for change in the lives of blind individuals across Massachusetts. As one of 52 affiliates supporting our national movement, we are honored to welcome Grace Pires as our national representative this year. Her wealth of experience, combined with the learning and leadership opportunities available throughout this weekend, fuels my excitement for what we can achieve together in the year ahead.

I look forward to hearing your insights, ideas, and aspirations as we continue to **live the lives we want!**

With Love, Hope and Determination

Shara Winton President

NFB PLEDGE

I pledge to participate actively in the efforts of the National Federation of the Blind to achieve equality, opportunity, and security for the blind; to support the policies and programs of the Federation and to abide by its constitution.

NFB MESSAGE

The National Federation of the Blind knows that blindness is not the characteristic that defines you or your future. Every day we raise the expectations of blind people because low expectations create obstacles between blind people and their dreams. You can live the life you want; blindness is not what holds you back.

NFB CODE OF CONDUCT

All NFB members, employees, contractors, event attendees, volunteers, and program participants are subject to the NFB Code of Conduct. Everyone is strongly encouraged to review the Code which can be found at:
www.nfb.org/codeofconduct.

NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVE

This year we are delighted to have Grace Pires, President of the National Federation of the Blind of Rhode Island, serving as our National Representative.



Description: “Head-and-shoulders studio portrait of Grace Pires, with long, curly brown hair, wearing a pink, green, and black floral top, facing the camera with a neutral expression against a light gray brick wall background.

Grace Pires was elected to the National Federation of the Blind Board of Directors in July 2022 and serves as president of the National Federation of the Blind of Rhode Island. Born in Portugal in 1970, Grace's blindness was noticed by her mother when she was only three months old. Although doctors confirmed a vision problem, the exact cause was never determined. Some suggested retinitis pigmentosa while others believed it to be Leber's disease. Her younger brother is also blind.

Grace did not begin school until age ten because the island where she lived had no school for the blind. After a difficult residential school experience on a neighboring island, her family immigrated to the United States so she could receive an education. Placed in fourth grade to be with children her age, she first had to learn English and Braille before catching up academically. By seventh grade she was completing her schoolwork independently, an achievement that brought her great pride.

She began learning cane travel at age twelve. Though initially reluctant because she feared it would make her blindness more visible, she quickly embraced the independence it provided. During her early teenage years, Grace struggled with the lack of blind role models until a teacher introduced her to a blind woman named Monica, who became an important mentor and showed her that blind people could live successful, fulfilling lives.

Grace attended Rhode Island College, earning a bachelor's degree in social work and later a master's degree in the same field when employment opportunities were limited. As transportation services improved, she was able to work with clients in the community. She later worked at an independent living center and then for the state of Rhode

Island as a rehabilitation teacher. While working, she earned a second master's degree in rehabilitation counseling and has served as a vocational rehabilitation counselor since 2009.

Grace joined the National Federation of the Blind in 2000 after beginning her career, wanting to give back to the community. Instead, she found a welcoming movement that profoundly shaped her life and leadership. Today she works to be a positive role model for others, sharing both practical skills and confidence about blindness.

She is particularly interested in legislative advocacy. Grace helped advance a parental rights bill after facing doubts about her own ability to care for her child as a blind parent. She has also worked on improving voting accessibility and expanding transportation services for people with disabilities in Rhode Island.

Balancing work, family, and advocacy can be demanding, especially as she often translates for her Portuguese-speaking parents at appointments. In her free time, Grace enjoys reading, knitting, taking long walks, watching Netflix with her husband Robert, and playing Uno with her nieces.

Grace believes one of her most important roles in the Federation is listening to others, meeting people where they are, and serving as a role model for blind people striving to live happy, productive lives.

REGISTRATION

Pick up your registration packet and convention agenda in the Grand Foyer.

Friday 12:00 PM to 7:00 PM

Saturday 8:00 AM to 9:00 AM

FOOD AND BEVERAGE NOTES

Do please enjoy breakfast at the hotel's Scoreboard Sports Bar and Grill. The morning after you have stayed a night, at the hotel within our hotel block, your breakfast is free. Breakfast begins at 7 AM. Additionally, we will not be offering coffee at the start of the Saturday's general sessions. Please enjoy the coffee from your room or from the restaurant. Your Friday Dinner, Saturday lunch and Banquet Dinner are provided with a Full Registration package.

CONVENTION ZOOM PLATFORM

We will be providing Zoom access for the state convention for Friday's General Session, Saturday's General Session, Banquet, and the Sunday morning Business Session.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://nfb-org.zoom.us/j/94518011561?pwd=1sezymizdZhSbFOifgbDmGlaToC8uW.1>

Meeting ID: 945 1801 1561

Passcode: 2026

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Join instructions

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ZOOM HELP DESK

: Cullen Gallagher cullen.gallagher@gmail.com or 781-428-1254

DOOR PRIZES

Carol Maurice will serve as our Door Prize Chair. Door prizes will be drawn in general convention sessions, and you must be present to win. Please bring your prizes to Carol prior to the beginning of general sessions.

AUCTION

Throughout the weekend, we will conduct our Annual Auction under the stellar leadership of our Auction Chair, Stephanie Valdez of Fitchburg. For those who purchase an auction item, please be advised that once an auction item has been purchased, it is the sole responsibility of the purchaser from that moment on. The NFB of Massachusetts is not responsible for shipping and/or insurance expenses related to purchased auction items, nor is the NFB of Massachusetts liable for damage to any shipped items.

Exhibits will be open in Salon A throughout the convention at the discretion of the individual exhibitor and primarily when there are no competing convention activities.

Friday: 12:00 PM to 3:00 PM

Saturday: 7:00 AM-8:45 AM & 12:00PM-1:00PM

Saturday: 4:30 PM – 6:30PM

Friday, March 27

12:00PM to 3:00 PM

REGISTRATION

Grand Foyer

Pick up your pre-registration packets.

12:00 PM to 3:00 PM **Imagination in Motion**

Salon B

Minh Ha, Providence, RI

A Drop-In Art Room for Makers and Dreamers

Need a break from the hustle of life? Come recharge your imagination with direct, tactile artmaking in the Drop-In Art Room: a relaxed, creative space open to everyone. No experience is needed; stay for a few minutes or lose track of time while exploring rainbow loom jewelry, tactile drawing, origami, flip-pics, and other imaginative projects. Whether you're a lifelong maker or just curious to try something new, this is a welcoming place to express yourself, create freely, and connect with others through tactile art.

12:30 PM White Cane and Structured Discovery

Salon F

Rachel Grider, Rustin, LA

Structured Discovery: How Does It Work?

Do you have questions about how blind people travel independently? Do you want to firm up your orientation and mobility skills? Are you interested in learning tips and tricks for performing every-day tasks non-visually?

Do you wonder what makes Structured Discovery training centers unique? If any of these questions apply to you, then you'll want to drop into this break-out session where you can learn about Structured Discovery, work on some cane travel skills, and ask questions about attending a training center to increase your independence. In addition, there will be an opportunity to receive some one-on-one orientation and mobility training.

1:30 PM to 2:30 PM Emergency Preparedness

Salon G

Basil Maurice, Springfield, MA

Grace Anderson, Birmingham, AL

General Session I Salon C and D

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://nfb-org.zoom.us/j/94518011561?pwd=1sezymizdZhSbFOifgbDmGlaToC8uW.1>

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3:00 PM to 3:15 PM

CALL TO ORDER, WELCOMING REMARKS AND
OPENING CEREMONIES

Shara Winton, President, NFB of Massachusetts

3:20 PM to 3:40 PM

NEW VOICES RISING: Presenting the 2026 NFB of
Massachusetts Students

Christopher Suppice, President, NFB of Massachusetts
Student Division.

Kyra Sweeney, Scholarship Chair

3:45 PM to 4:15 PM

THE FEDERATION on the Move: A National Report

Grace Pires, President, National Federation of the Blind of
Rhode Island

4:20 PM to 4:45 PM Lift Every Voice:

Jana Jackson A Blind Professional in voice Arts

Jana Jackson, from Nashville, is a woman of many talents and interests. She often refers to herself as a Renaissance Woman, putting her heart into passions such as music, voice acting, travel, and advocacy. Learn how she has successfully tackled a Gospel singing career, her own travel Agency and since 2010 voice acting; radio ads, video presentations, and most recently, AI - language modeling.

4:50 PM to 5:10 PM

REMIXING CREATIVITY: Making Music with AI

Cullen Gallagher, Quincy, Massachusetts

AI and its capabilities are rapidly evolving. One particularly fun use case is creating original music, with output quality improving dramatically over time. Cullen will share the process he used to produce songs for various events. He will also offer practical tips and tricks to help others start making their own AI-generated music.

5:10 PM to 5:20 PM

Overview of the resolutions that are being submitted.

5:20pm. Auction item and door prizes

5:30 ADJOURN SESSION I

5:35PM to 6:35 PM

Massachusetts Parents of Blind Children (MAPBC) Salon G
Stephanie Berarra Valdes, President MAPBC

Join us for our annual business meeting as we come together to reflect, connect, and shape the year ahead.

During the business portion of the meeting, we will review

important updates, elect our 2026 leadership team, and discuss key plans that will guide our chapter forward. Please note that only current dues paying members are eligible to vote in the election.

We will also spend time setting meaningful goals for 2026 and participating in an interactive activity designed to strengthen our voices and build confidence as we support our children.

FRIDAY EVENING, March 27, 2026

Salons CD

7:00 PM

Boston North Ender Italian Dinner

8:00 PM to 11:00 PM

MIC & MOJO: NFB Jams – Where Federation Spirit Meets Friday Night Groove

Start the convention weekend with a night of creativity, fun, and Federation pride. Mic & Mojo: NFB Jams is our open-mic and talent showcase featuring performers from across Massachusetts. Each performer will have five minutes to share their talent. Prizes will be awarded to the top three acts. Come for the music and stay for the mojo! It's the Federation at its finest!

Performances can include karaoke, original music, poetry, skits, or comedy.

- Each performance slot is 5 minutes long.
- A donation of \$10 donation is suggested.
- The evening will be capped at 25 performers. Sign up early!

- Come dressed as your favorite musician or performing artist! Show off your creativity for a chance to win fun prizes.
- Whether you're performing or cheering from the crowd, this will be a night full of energy, laughter, and unforgettable talent.
- Interested in performing? Please email cullen.gallagher@gmail.com or at 781-428-1254 to secure your spot on stage today!

SATURDAY MORNING, March 28, 2026

7:00 AM – 8:00 AM Scholarship Breakfast- Salon B
Important! Invitation Only Breakfast
Kyra Sweeney, Scholarship Chair, Bryton, MA

7:00 AM to 8:45 PM
EXHIBITOR & SPONSOR FAIR OPEN
Salon A

8:00 AM to 12:00 PM
REGISTRATION
Grand Foyer
Pick up your packets and swag bag.

8:15 AM to 8:45 AM
NOMINATING COMMITTEE
Mika Pyyhkala, Chair
(Note: This is a closed meeting of the convention. Only appointed representatives from chapters and divisions are permitted to be in attendance.)

General Session II Salon CD

Join Zoom Meeting

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9:00 AM to 9:15 AM

LET'S GET STARTED: and AUCTION ITEM

Shara Winton, President, NFB of Massachusetts

9:25 AM to 9:55 AM

MCB: State of MCB

John Oliveira, Commissioner, MCB

9:55 AM to 10:10AM NABS Report, Elizabeth Minor, Board Member, National Association of Blind Students

10:15 AM to 10:50 AM Perkins Library for the Blind: Kim Charlson, Director

11:00A.m to 11:45AM. Chris Peterson AFC®, Founder and CEO, Penny Forward

Blind People Building Bright Futures One Penny at a Time
This presentation teaches the basics of investing in a simple, step-by-step way. You will learn how money grows over time, the different ways to invest (like stocks, bonds, and real estate), and how to avoid common mistakes like rushing into bad deals or following the crowd. The presentation also explains how financial markets work and why it's important to have a plan instead of just hoping to get rich fast.

11:45 AM

Door prizes, Announcements and AUCTION ITEM

12:00 PM to 12:55 PM Lunch Salons CD

12:00 PM- 12:50PM MABS Business meeting. Students, please pick up your lunches and go to Salon B.

Are you a blind high school or college student looking to network with others on aspects of student life? Join the Massachusetts Association of Blind Students for their in-person business meeting where they will discuss important programs, accept new members through collecting dues and hold elections to determine leaders of our organization.

Christopher Suplice, President, Massachusetts Association of Blind Students

Elizabeth Minor, Board Member, National Association of Blind Students

Afternoon General Session

Salon CD

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://nfb->

[org.zoom.us/j/94518011561?pwd=1sezymizdZhSbFOifgbDmGlaToC8uW.1](https://nfb-org.zoom.us/j/94518011561?pwd=1sezymizdZhSbFOifgbDmGlaToC8uW.1)

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1:00 PM. Call to order

Door prizes

1:05 PM. to 1:35 PM. You Go with Waymo:

Hannah Tuten, WAYMO Public Affairs Manager

When will WAYMO be in Boston and how can we help get it here? *Waymo is a fully autonomous driving technology company with a mission to be the world's most trusted driver by improving the world's access to mobility while saving thousands of lives now lost to traffic crashes. Over the past decade, Waymo has worked with the National Federation of the Blind to design and develop a suite of accessibility features to ensure our service meets a variety of user needs.*

1:40 PM to 2:00 PM Major MOVEMENT: Presidential Report
Shara Winton, President, NFB of Massachusetts,

2:00 PM to 2:15 PM
NFB Legal Update- Al Ilya-Board member, National Association of Guide Dog users and Senior Staff Attorney at Disability Law United

2:20 to 2:45 PM Advocacy in Action:
Kyra Sweeney, First Vice-President, Legislative Director, NFB of Massachusetts

2: 45 PM to 3:15 PM Today's AI and its evolving intelligence
Minh Ha, Providence, RI
Hai Nguyen Ly, Florence, MA
Mika Pyyhkala, South Boston, MA
AI can be a great tool for independence—and an amplifier for advocacy efforts—when you know how to ask. This session shows blind and low-vision users how to put today's AI to work for everyday life: summarizing information fast, drafting compelling advocacy letters, organizing daily tasks, and reducing cognitive load. Live, screen-reader-friendly demos will be paired with a practical “prompt engineering” toolkit: how to give context, set constraints, request structured outputs, and iterate when you're just not getting the results you are looking for. You'll leave with prompt ideas for advocacy letters, meeting follow-ups, article summaries, and planning routines—plus strategies to verify outputs and protect privacy.

3:15 PM to 3:25 PM Member to Member: Getting to know you
Bronwen Tedesko, Arlington, MA

Explaining the member-to-member project

3:35 PM to 3:45 PM Bell Academy update
Stephanie Berarra Valdes, Bell Academy Director

3:50 PM to 4:15 PM The National Federation of the Blind
Training Centers
Rachel Grider, Rustin Louisiana
Learn about the Louisiana Center for the Blind and our other
NFB Training Centers. Is structured Discovery for you. Learn
how it works and why it so successful.

4:15PM Auction item, door prizes and adjourn Session III.
Break Outs

4:45 PM to 6:00 PM Saturday Evening Break-outs

Imagination in Motion

Salon B

Minh Ha, Providence, RI

A Drop-In Art Room for Makers and Dreamers

Need a break from the hustle of convention? Come recharge your imagination with direct, tactile artmaking in the Drop-In Art Room: a relaxed, creative space open to everyone. No experience is needed; stay for a few minutes or lose track of time while exploring rainbow loom jewelry, tactile drawing, origami, flip-pics, and other imaginative projects. Whether you're a lifelong maker or just curious to try something new, this is a welcoming place to express yourself, create freely, and connect with others through tactile art.

4:45PM to 6:30PM Beyond Sight: The Power and Precision
of Blind Fencing
Salon F

Step into the dynamic world of Blind Fencing and discover a sport where strategy, precision, and skill take center stage. Coach Cesar Morales of the International Fencing Club will demonstrate how Blind Fencing is practiced and trained at a competitive level, joined by blind fencers Stephanie and Christopher. This interactive breakout session will provide a live demonstration of technique, communication, and tactical movement unique to Blind Fencing. Attendees will also have the opportunity to step onto the strip, try the sport for themselves, and learn how fencing is being reimagined as an exciting competitive pathway for blind and low vision athletes.

Whether you are an athlete, an advocate, or simply curious, this session offers a powerful look at what is possible when determination meets discipline.

**4:45 PM to 6:30 PM White Cane and Structured
Discovery
Salon G**

Rachel Grider, Rustin, LA

Structured Discovery: How Does It Work?

Do you have questions about how blind people travel independently? Do you want to firm up your orientation and mobility skills? Are you interested in learning tips and tricks for performing every-day tasks non-visually?

Do you wonder what makes Structured Discovery training centers unique? If any of these questions apply to you, then you'll want to drop into this break-out session where you can learn about Structured Discovery and work on some cane travel skills. In addition, there will be an opportunity to receive some one-on-one orientation and mobility training.

Annual Banquet
7:00 PM Salon CD

Stephanie Berarra Valdes, Mistress of Ceremonies,

Join Zoom Meeting

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Key Note Address:

Grace Pires, NFB President, Rhode Island

VOICES OF TOMORROW: Scholarship Presentations

Kyra Sweeney, Chair, NFB of Massachusetts Scholarship Committee

AUCTION: Annual Fundraising Auction
Shannon Cantan, NFB of Massachusetts Auctioneer

SUNDAY MORNING, March 29, 2026

SESSION IV Salon CD

9:00 AM TO 12:15 AM

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://nfb-org.zoom.us/j/94518011561?pwd=1sezymizdZhSbFOifgbDmGlaToC8uW.1>

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Join instructions

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9:00 AM to 9:05 AM

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Shara Winton, President, NFB of Massachusetts

9:05 AM to 9:35 AM
NFB Philosophy

9:40 AM to 10:00 AM
THE NEXT VERSE: How to find your sweet spot in the NFB
of Massachusetts
Grace Anderson, Birmingham, Alabama
Gene Kim, Cambridge Massachusetts

10:05 AM to 10:30 AM
VOICES UNITED: Chapter and divisions Reports

10:30 AM to 12:00 PM
THE Business Meeting

NFB of Massachusetts Treasurers Report, Elections,
Resolutions, and Transportation Report

12:00 PM
Final Prizes, special recognition, and the 2027 Convention
Announcement

12:15 END SESSION IV, AND ADJOURN THE 2026
CONVENTION