

Thank you for supporting DeafBlind Leadership NOW. We would like to invite you to join us on our journey as we share the evolution of DBLN's movement and core team, with special thanks to individuals who helped us along the way. We will conclude with information on how you can contribute to DBLN's efforts. (Missed the last update? Read here: [DBLN-Alliance-1-13-2025-Starburst.pdf](#)).

What Sparked DBLN?

On July 22, 2024, 4 days before the anniversary of the 34th Americans with Disabilities Act, an unspoken but clear promise was broken. In 2014, the DeafBlind community had high hopes a DeafBlind Executive Director of the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) would be chosen. Hopes were dashed. The Board felt the top qualified DeafBlind candidate, Christopher Woodfill, was not ready. So, an Associate Executive Director (AED) position was created to eventually elevate him into the Executive Director position "next time" (source links: [Helen Keller Services for the Blind](#); [DeafBlind Leadership NOW | Bryen M. Yunashko's Letter](#)). The "next time" came in 2021. A non-DeafBlind HKNC personnel, Deborah Harlin, was promoted into the Executive Director position (source link: [Helen Keller Services Promotes Executive Director – Helen Keller Services](#)). The "next time" came again in 2024 and a non-DeafBlind Executive Director, John Filek, was selected, yet again (source link: [HELEN KELLER NATIONAL CENTER APPOINTS NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR John Filek M.Ed. – Helen Keller Services](#)). HKNC, the only national comprehensive vocational rehabilitation training center for deafblind youths and adults, comprises of roughly 7% DeafBlind personnel out of over 170 employees with a 5% DeafBlind Board (only 1 DeafBlind board member). For more than half a century, HKNC has never had a DeafBlind Executive Director. For these reasons, the DeafBlind community mobilized bringing together 262 DeafBlind petitioners, including authors, business owners, community organizers and parents, to sign a historic petition calling for DeafBlind Leadership NOW, inspired and authored by John Lee Clark (JLC). For more information, please visit our frequently asked questions at this link: [DeafBlind Leadership NOW | Frequently Asked Questions](#).

Evolution of DBLN

Knowing he would be busy pursuing his doctoral studies, JLC tapped a few people to help usher in supporters. Cristina Hartmann and Suzanne “Suzi” Guimond were the glue that enabled DBLN movement to forge ahead as we slowly began to stand on our own, supported by brilliant minds managing advocacy and legislative outreach, operating the website, moderating the DBLN alliance listserv, fundraising, and administering social media accounts. All hands were on deck working feverishly to launch the website on August 13, 2024 and to usher in supporters in the DBLN alliance listserv. Since then, the DBLN core team structure has been fluid, shifting, and changing. We were aware that JLC was focused on his doctoral studies. Cristina and Suzi graciously provided their temporary periodic recaps and insights with their hands on the ground for political rumblings and premonitions. The November presidential elections kept us occupied as we braced ourselves for our uncertain futures. As the holidays approached, we embraced our loved ones, both human and furry. DBLN Core Team As some of you may already have come across in the listserv updates or social media outlets, Marc Safman is DBLN’s advocacy/legislative outreach point of contact, Theresa Wells is DBLN’s web mistress, and Vicky Magliocchino is DBLN’s fundraiser. We also have a DBLN admin who synthesizes and edits information to update across all platforms including DBLN’s listserv, blog, and social media accounts. We are all volunteers. Hence, we will eventually need someone to take over social media accounts. If you know a DeafBlind social media wizard, please email suggestions (with permission) to info@deafblindleadershipnow.org.

How You Can Help

While Marc has been reaching out to his local representatives and the cosponsors of the bill versions of Helen Keller Reauthorization Act (H.R. 4749 and S. 2376) over the past several months, many of the congressional staff members noted that DBLN reminds them of Deaf President NOW (DPN) movement. Did you know the DPN documentary, produced by Concordia Studio and co-directed by Nyle DiMarco and Davis Guggenheim, who are also producers, along with others in collaboration with Gallaudet University, recently premiered at the 2025 Sundance Film Festival? (It will be released later this year on Apple TV+; source links: [Apple Original Films’ “Deaf President Now!” premieres at 2025 Sundance](#)

[Film Festival - Apple TV+ Press; Premiere of “Deaf President Now!” documentary at Sundance Film Festival — The Daily Moth.](#)) For years non-Deaf people have tried to produce this documentary but the Deaf community held firm that Deaf people should lead the production of this documentary as their ancestors did at DPN. We need your help holding firm to our mission for a DeafBlind-led HKNC for our future generations of DeafBlind leaders by reaching out to your local representatives. Please refer to this link for sample letters to reach out to your local House of Representatives and Senators: [DeafBlind Leadership NOW | Advocacy](#). Once you have reached out to your local representatives either in person or via email, we would sincerely appreciate you updating Marc at outreach@deafblindleadershipnow.org.

Special Thanks

DBLN would also like to thank Haben Girma, a fierce Deafblind disability rights advocate, for sending out the first global flare in the sky that put DBLN on the map on her Facebook platform, August 3, 2024 (source link: [Haben Girma - Helen Keller Services once again passed over... | Facebook](#)). We would also like to thank Morrison, a DeafBlind influencer, educator, and consultant, for spreading awareness of DBLN's cause on Instagram. Through their captioned, transcribed, and described ASL vlogs, they have increased engagement and garnered necessary financial support to further DBLN's cause. Interested in joining/supporting DBLN? Please email to join DBLN alliance listserv at info@deafblindleadershipnow.org. Thank you!

DBLN Strong,

DBLN Core Team