

Dear DBLN supporters,

Thank you for continuing to support DeafBlind Leadership NOW. We would like to share some latest developments with you and how you can continue to support DBLN. If you missed the last update, please refer to this link: [DBLN Alliance 2/20/25 Starburst.](#)

Enough Talk. Time For Action.

Marc Safman, DBLN's head of legislative advocacy and outreach, met with Helen Keller Services (HKS) and Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) senior management on February 11, 2025. During this meeting, we learned that the established unpublicized working group was focused on identifying barriers to leadership nationwide outside of HKNC. While we appreciate HKS-HKNC's efforts to foster dialogue with curiously butchered CART, we have concerns that HKS still controls the direction of the working group. Hence, the working group still does not directly address HKS's historical pattern of passing over qualified and talented DeafBlind professionals nor addresses its own structural barriers to DeafBlind leadership at HKNC.

We feel it's time to stop talking and start changing the status quo. DBLN's 262 DeafBlind petitioners emphasize four demands: 1) a DeafBlind executive director is appointed; 2) HKNC becomes its own autonomous entity; 3) HKNC has its own newly established board comprising of 70 percent or more DeafBlind members; and 4) protections for the HKNC petition signers from retaliation. This vision has been similarly shared with major organizations such as the National Association of the Deaf and the National Federation of the Blind-DeafBlind Division. For more information on additional DBLN supporters, please refer to this link: [Letters/Statements of Support.](#)

Shared Services. Stifled Growth.

DBLN feels that HKS is not being sincere in sharing our vision for a DeafBlind-led HKNC. HKS has had 58 years of taxpayer support since HKNC's inception in 1967 to tackle structural barriers to DeafBlind leadership at HKNC. Many qualified and talented DeafBlind professionals have already applied and expressed interest in the executive leadership

position. Yet, for over half a century, it seems HKS still resists the idea that DeafBlind people can lead an organization that serves people once like them.

While we understand Peter Salmon and the historical DeafBlind leaders, Robert Smithdas and Mary Switzer, led the first small DeafBlind student program out of the Helen Keller Services for the Blind (formerly Industry Home for the Blind) and are credited with the inception of HKNC in 1967, we feel the shared services model no longer serves in the best interests of DeafBlind consumers and prevents DeafBlind leaders from reaching their fullest career and leadership potential at HKNC.

Furthermore, although, the 2019 commitment to hire 20 “DeafBlind” specialists has led to the hiring of 13 “DeafBlind” specialists, DeafBlind individuals are still not yet meaningfully represented on the HKS Board of Trustees (BOTs), in executive or management roles nor its overall workforce. According to credible sources, HKNC comprises of 6-7% DeafBlind staff out of over 170 employees with only 1 DeafBlind Board member (5% of HKS BOTs). Recognize the parallel? It’s clear HKS needs to address their own structural barriers. We believe it’s time for HKS-HKSB to retire their brand and cut the umbilical cord that’s stifling HKNC’s growth. Therefore, we also believe HKSB would be more readily and efficiently merged with existing Blind ecosystem.

Helen Keller Services’ mission is “to enable individuals who are blind, DeafBlind, have low vision or combined hearing and vision loss to live, work and thrive in their community of choice” yet resists being a role model for others to follow in their own backyard—at HKNC (source link: [HKS’s Mission](#)). We believe DeafBlind people have strong intuitions and that autonomous DeafBlind spaces yield effective practices for future generations of DeafBlind leaders to come. DeafBlind leaders have been around for several decades, many of whom are in high leadership and administrative positions in public, private and nonprofit sectors (source link: [DBLN Signatories](#)). No more excuses.

How You Can Help

As some of you may have already learned in the news, half of the Department of Education’s workforce was laid off on March 11, 2025,

including legally mandated positions from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services which oversees critical funding for the Helen Keller National Center, the American Printing House for the Blind, the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, Gallaudet University, and more. Please refer to action items at this link: [Disability Rights Watch 3/19/25](#).

To help DeafBlind Leadership happen NOW, please reach out to your local House and Senate representatives using sample letters at this link: [DBLN's Sample Advocacy Letters](#). Vicky Magliocchino and Theresa Wells will be at the upcoming Florida DeafBlind Association gathering in April with sample letters for local DeafBlind members to sign. Other DeafBlind organizations are encouraged to do the same. When you have reached out to your local representatives, we would sincerely appreciate you updating Marc Safman at outreach@deafblindleadershipnow.org.

Special Thanks and Congratulations

We thank the Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled for their powerful letter supporting DBLN (source link: [BCID's LOS](#)). We would also like to congratulate Morrison on their new position as the Director of Bureau of Services for Persons Who are Deaf, DeafBlind or Hard of Hearing at the Connecticut Aging and Disability Services. Morrison may be followed on LinkedIn at this link: [Morrison's LinkedIn](#).

DBLN Strong,
DBLN Core Team