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**National Federation of the Blind Assists Blind Woman in Litigation against
Massage and Body Work Licensing Authority**

Kristen Steele Not Allowed to Take Licensing Examination in Braille

Baltimore, Maryland (February 28, 2017): The National Federation of the Blind, the nation's leading advocate for equal education and career opportunities for the blind, is assisting Kristen Steele in her lawsuit (Case 1:17-cv-00004-RP-SBJ) against the Federation of State Massage Therapy Boards (FSMTB), which has denied her request to take its examination, the Massage and Bodywork Licensing Examination (MBLEx), in Braille. Ms. Steele seeks to become a licensed massage therapist in Iowa and Nebraska, both of which require passing the MBLEx in order to receive a license. Strangely, the FSMTB claims that Braille would somehow provide her with an unfair advantage.

Ms. Steele began learning Braille at the age of three and is a fluent reader. Furthermore, she has used Braille throughout her education, including her studies at the Midwest School of Massage in Omaha, NE, where she graduated with a 4.0 GPA. Her lawsuit, which has been filed in the Federal District Court for the Southern District of Iowa, Western Division, alleges that FSMTB is violating federal law, specifically Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), by denying her request to use Braille to take the MBLEx. Regulations pursuant to Title III of the ADA require that testing entities administer examinations in ways that best ensure that "when the examination is administered to an individual with a disability that impairs sensory, manual, or speaking skills, the examination results accurately reflect the individual's aptitude or achievement level or whatever other factor the examination purports to measure, rather than reflecting the individual's impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills . . ." In Ms. Steele's case, this means administering the examination in Braille, since she has used Braille throughout her education and in similar testing situations, such as taking the ACT in high school. Her lawsuit asks the court to order FSMTB to administer the MBLEx to her in Braille.

Mark A. Riccobono, President of the National Federation of the Blind, said: "In the nearly two centuries since its invention by a blind student, Braille has become widely recognized as the most

effective means of reading and writing for the blind, and countless blind individuals have achieved educational and career success and the ability to live the lives we want by using it. Braille does not afford Ms. Steele any unfair advantage in taking the MBLEx or any other test, any more than using print provides an unfair advantage to sighted test takers. Indeed, requiring her to use a method other than Braille will place Ms. Steele at an unfair disadvantage compared to other test takers. The National Federation of the Blind will continue to fight for the right of blind people to use the auxiliary aid of their choice when taking high-stakes tests."

Ms. Steele is represented, with the assistance of the National Federation of the Blind, by Tai Tomasi of Disability Rights Iowa, and by Sharon Krevor-Weisbaum and Emily Levenson of the Baltimore firm Brown, Goldstein & Levy LLP.

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About the National Federation of the Blind

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 our dreams. You can live the life you want; blindness is not what holds you back.

National Federation of the Blind

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