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Blind Students Sue Florida State University for Discrimination

National Federation of the Blind Outraged at University's Actions

Baltimore, Maryland (June 29, 2011): With the assistance of the National Federation of the Blind, two blind students—Christopher Shane Toth and Jamie Ann Principato—filed suit today against Florida State University (FSU) and its board of trustees. The suit alleges that FSU's Department of Mathematics discriminated against Mr. Toth and Ms. Principato by failing to provide them with proper accommodations so that they could successfully complete required math courses for their respective degree programs. The violations include requiring the students to use an inaccessible Web-based application to complete homework assignments, tests, and quizzes; requiring the use of clickers that cannot be used by a blind person to respond to in-class questions and obtain bonus credit; failing to provide Braille versions of the required textbooks in violation of agreed-upon accommodation plans; and engaging in retaliatory actions when the students complained of these violations. In all cases, faculty members in the Department of Mathematics were generally uncooperative, unhelpful, and even hostile, and did not provide meaningful alternative methods for Mr. Toth and Ms. Principato to successfully complete the required courses. As a result, both students are currently unable to continue their degree programs and find their careers indefinitely on hold.

Dr. Marc Maurer, President of the National Federation of the Blind, said: "Discrimination against blind students is all too common, but it rarely stems from actual animus towards the students. This case, however, involves the repeated, deliberate, and intentional disregard of the rights of these two students, whose academic records have now suffered irreparable damage and who have suffered lost opportunities, emotional distress,

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embarrassment, humiliation, and retaliation by university officials. The National Federation of the Blind will not stand for this outrageous treatment of blind students and we will continue to support this lawsuit as fully as necessary in order to ensure that these young people are compensated for the egregious conduct of faculty and staff in FSU's Department of Mathematics."

The plaintiffs are represented in this matter by Daniel F. Goldstein, Sharon Krevor-Weisbaum, and Brooke E. Lierman of the Baltimore firm Brown, Goldstein & Levy; and Matthew Dietz of the Miami firm Law Offices of Matthew W. Dietz, P.L.

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About the National Federation of the Blind

With more than 50,000 members, the National Federation of the Blind is the largest and most influential membership organization of blind people in the United States. The NFB improves blind people's lives through advocacy, education, research, technology, and programs encouraging independence and self-confidence. It is the leading force in the blindness field today and the voice of the nation's blind. In January 2004 the NFB opened the National Federation of the Blind Jernigan Institute, the first research and training center in the United States for the blind led by the blind.