

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 13, 2011

Contact: Stuart O. Simms
Greg P. Care
410-962-1030

PAINTBALL PARK DISCRIMINATES AGAINST THE BLIND

The Blind Industries and Services of Maryland (BISM) and three blind men who were denied access to paintball matches at the Route 40 Paintball Park in White Marsh filed a federal lawsuit against the park for violating federal and state civil rights laws. The laws require places of public accommodation like the park to offer their activities and services on a free and equal basis and not discriminate on the basis of disability.

On May 21, 2011, a group of two BISM instructors and six students arrived at their appointed time at the Route 40 Paintball Park at 11011 Pulaski Highway in White Marsh to play paintball as part of a practical demonstration of orientation and mobility skills. The park refused to allow the blind customers to play solely on the basis of uninformed assumptions that blind people cannot play paintball. The group explained to the park staff how they would safely navigate the field and play in the match as they had done at other paintball parks. The park renewed its refusal. Then the group advised the park staff that the Maryland White Cane Law requires free and equal access to the paintball matches, but the park again refused. Baltimore County Police were called to mediate the dispute, but to no avail. Subsequently, the police issued a crime report finding that the park had committed a misdemeanor violation of the Maryland White Cane Law. Criminal proceedings are pending in the District Court of Maryland.

Prior to filing suit, the blind customers reached out to the park, but the park did not respond. One of the blind customers, Marco Carranza, commented, "It was very upsetting to be turned away and shocking that such discrimination still exists. We know what we are capable of and being told 'no' threatens our independence." Another blind customer, James Konechne, expressed his dismay that the park refused to consider the group's explanation of how they would play, "I have played at larger, more complicated parks and never had a problem. They just wouldn't listen to us." President of BISM, Fred Puente, said, "We teach people confidence and skills so they can do things without limitations. What the park has done runs against everything we teach and know blind people can do."

Their attorney, Gregory Care of the Baltimore law firm of Brown, Goldstein & Levy, said, "Blind people have the same interests as their sighted peers. The law unconditionally affirms their right to participate in social and recreational activities like paintball and not be denied because of unfounded assumptions of what they can and cannot do." Co-counsel Stuart O. Simms added, "Unfortunately, this is not the first time blind customers have been turned away because of a 'caretaker' attitude. This discrimination won't be tolerated."

#