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November 4, 2017

Kalamazoo, MI- National Federation of the Blind of Michigan State Convention

A travel advisory is hereby issued by the National Federation of the Blind of Michigan for the Detroit Metropolitan Airport (DTW), which is administered by the Wayne County Airport Authority (WCAA).

Individuals using public transportation traveling to and from DTW are advised to travel with extreme CAUTION. Waiting areas for buses and related transit are outdoors. These waiting areas are significant distances from the entrances to indoor areas. There is no access to Skycaps or other assistance for handling luggage. During certain times of day, jet engine noise and diesel engine noise make it nearly impossible to hear within the public transportation loading area. There is also minimal protection from the harsh elements in the winter. Jet and Diesel fumes from nearby planes and idling Busses in the Ground Transportation Center (GTC) create dangerous levels of pollution, placing persons with respiratory issues at risk. Exposure to these conditions for some persons with disabilities may be dangerous.

This advisory is issued in response to the disappointing decision by the Wayne County Airport Authority (WCAA) to adopt Regulation Section 13 (<https://goo.gl/uj9vDM>), effective April 4, 2016, implementing segregated bus stops for persons with disabilities.

The WCAA Regulation legalizes individual discrimination and harassment in the DTW. The Regulation prevents access to public facilities and services regularly enjoyed by travelers to and from DTW. The Regulation prevents individuals from protecting themselves from discrimination, harassment, and retaliation by restricting and penalizing others, including public transportation providers, who may lend assistance in enforcing the rights of persons with disabilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

These Regulations force persons with disabilities to unlawfully and unnecessarily disclose their disability in order to use the public facilities, commonly enjoyed by the general public without impediment or inconvenience. Furthermore, travel in and around the airport for persons with disabilities is made inconvenient and inaccessible by multitudinous violations of various accessibility laws and rules.

the NFB of Michigan wants to make travelers aware of looming danger, which could include the following example of what has happened to some Airport visitors (see YouTube Video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZaoaQ2fFe0)

Extremely loud bus loading and unloading areas within an open-air, concrete parking structure may deprive blind persons of any audible means of orienting themselves, and very limited ability to communicate with others to seek directions or other information.

Extremely cold winter temperatures endanger all persons waiting for the arrival of a bus, but particularly those with disabilities that limit their body's abilities to regulate or sense dangerously cold effects during prolonged exposure to sub-freezing temperatures. These extremely cold temperatures are made worse by strong winds blowing through the parking structure and periodic blasts of jet exhaust entering the space.

Individuals have also experienced harassment by airport officials and unlawful inquiry regarding whether they have a disability. Others have reported disrespectful and unlawful questioning by airport officials when they requested basic accommodations. The WCAA has also posted discriminatory, stigmatizing, and disgraceful signs singling out persons with disabilities for separate treatment at DTW.

In addition the specific issues with the location of the public transportation bus stop:

- DTW lacks adequate and compliant Braille or audible directional signs to promote the independent travel of blind persons within the DTW.
- DTW has inaccessible kiosks and terminals necessary for checking into flights or determining the status of flights.
- There is no access to Skycaps in areas where public transportation arrives.
- DTW requires that persons must request a wheelchair if they need assistance with luggage, again causing persons to unlawfully disclose their disability, without regard to whether any person needs assistance beyond help with luggage.

In a Federal Court Case, DTW was found to have plausibly retaliated against those who advocated for accessibility within or around the DTW, resulting in federal court rulings ((case 2:15-cv-11512-DML-MJH). However, the Court allowed the WCAA to skirt liability based on a narrow, technical ruling. This Federal ruling severely threatens the ability of persons with disabilities to seek assistance in assuring their fundamental rights to access remain intact.

The National Federation of the Blind of Michigan asks that all citizens and visitors to the DTW do the following:

- Warn your families, co-workers, friends, and anyone visiting DTW to beware of the safety concerns with travel in the airport and surrounding areas.
- Notify members of your trade associations, and social and civic organizations that they are traveling through DTW at their own risk and may be subject to harassment, unsafe environmental conditions, inaccessible services and facilities, and an inhospitable attitude from the WCAA and its management.

The National Federation of the Blind of Michigan will rescind this Travel Advisory for DTW when this Regulation is eliminated. This advisory is in effect indefinitely, starting today.

Travelers experiencing discrimination, denial of access to facilities or services guaranteed under the Americans with Disabilities act, Michigan Public Act 220, and all pertinent rules and regulations guaranteeing freedom of travel and accessibility may contact NFB to file and seek help on any claims for discrimination, harassment, retaliation, and whistleblowing.

VISIT WWW.NFBMI.ORG - LIKE NFBMI Facebook – FOLLOW @NFBMI for additional information and updates. To file reports of harassment and discrimination and get help contact Governor Snyder at 517-373-1837. Ask him to make Michigan safe for persons with disabilities and those who advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities.