

In-District Visit Report

The Honorable James Walkinshaw

Member of Congress, 11th District of Virginia

Main Contact

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Meeting Attended by Congressman: Yes

NFB-Fairfax Delegation

- Jeremy Grandstaff
- Jade Ham
- Christine Grassman
- Gary Grassman

Summary of Meeting



The National Federation of the Blind (NFB) Fairfax Chapter met with Congressman Walkinshaw and his Legislative Assistant, Jaelin Lespier, to discuss the recent reductions in force (RIFs) affecting the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) and related concerns about the future of critical blindness programs. Three copies of the NFB fact sheet were provided to the office. Pictures included were taken after the meeting.

Stories and Key Points Shared

Each attendee shared personal experiences and insights illustrating the devastating impact these federal actions are having on blind individuals and the programs that support them.

- **Jeremy Grandstaff** shared his story as an individual who lost employment due to economic instability and the closure of his company. While seeking full-time work, Jeremy serves as a contractor supporting youth and adults in career development and financial education. His story illustrated the importance of stable rehabilitation and

training programs for blind Americans seeking meaningful employment, as he has already noted a loss in related contracts at the state level, an indirect impact of the RIFs.

- **Jade Ham** represented the student perspective, discussing the effects on high school, college, and other blind students. Jade emphasized how federal education and rehabilitation programs have directly supported his education and independence.
- **Gary Grassman** discussed his 30 years of experience as a Randolph-Sheppard vendor in New York. He highlighted that 32 operators currently serve in Virginia, with 18 operating on Department of Defense (DOD) facilities. He also cited troubling reports that the Secretary of Defense has indicated an intent to exclude blind vendors from DOD facilities on the false basis that blind people pose a “security risk.”
- **Christine Grassman** emphasized several critical points:
 - The Randolph-Sheppard Act explicitly includes the DOD and U.S. Postal Service, requiring the Secretary of Education’s involvement in oversight — an engagement that appears not to have occurred.
 - The lack of proper federal oversight threatens the integrity and sustainability of these programs.
 - The RIFs also jeopardize vocational rehabilitation services, further disadvantaging individuals who are blind, institutionalized, or learning English as a second language.
 - She also noted potential negative consequences for the American Printing House for the Blind (APH), which relies on these programs for critical support.

The group collectively underscored that these developments risk reversing decades of progress toward equal opportunity and independence for blind Americans.

Congressman Walkinshaw’s Responses

- Congressman Walkinshaw reaffirmed his strong opposition to the RIFs, stating, *“I spoke out that this is illegal. I even have an article on MSNBC about it.”*
- He expressed concern that these cuts are *“punishing not just Democrats but everyone,”* emphasizing that the issue transcends party lines.
- He acknowledged that, even when Congress passes protective language, *“it doesn’t seem to stop the President from violating that law.”*

- The Congressman discussed ongoing debates within the Oversight Committee regarding the limits of executive power and expressed limited confidence in the Supreme Court to rein in these overreaches.
- He emphasized the importance of focusing on the **2026 elections** to protect essential programs and ensure accountability.
- Congressman Walkinshaw asked thoughtful, detailed questions to better understand the legal and practical challenges facing the blindness community.
- He confirmed his full support for all NFB legislative priorities and advocacy goals discussed.
- He stated that he is closely monitoring any federal job cuts impacting education, rehabilitation, and accessibility programs.
- He specifically praised the **testimonies and personal stories** shared during the meeting, noting that such narratives are powerful and essential in shaping congressional understanding and action. (The team reaffirmed that we are available to tell those stories publicly).

Next Steps and Support Needed from NFB

1. **Bipartisan Outreach:** Congressman Walkinshaw urged the NFB to engage Republican members of Congress to help build bipartisan support for protecting OSERS and related programs. (The team advised us were doing that and explanation of how).
2. **Story Sharing:** He emphasized that members' personal stories are crucial for convincing undecided lawmakers and humanizing the impact of these federal decisions.
3. **Continued Engagement:** The Congressman committed to continuing his advocacy and pressing the administration for answers regarding compliance with the law, including asking, *"What is their plan to fulfill these requirements?"*