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December 12, 2018

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Dear Chemistry Department Directors and Chairs:

I write to you on behalf of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB), the nation's largest organization of blind people in the United States, to alert you to accessibility barriers in tests produced and distributed by the American Chemical Society Division of Chemical Education Examinations Institute (ACS Exams).

Specifically, ACS Exams does not make available in Braille all versions of its chemistry tests, to the detriment of blind students. This lack of readily available Braille versions of ACS Exams has created unnecessary obstacles between blind chemistry students and the advancement of their chemistry studies. In some cases it is the lack of access to these very tests, which are used by colleges and universities across the country for placement and subject-mastery measures, that persuade blind students to shift their majors to another academic field or to delay their chemistry studies indefinitely.

In July of this year, the National Federation of the Blind brought our concerns directly to the American Chemical Society (ACS) and ACS Exams leadership. We were informed by Kristen Murphy, Director of ACS Exams, that ACS Exams had produced a Braille version of one of its placement exams, but because no one had asked to use it, ACS Exams delayed Braille production of all other exams. This explanation was of grave concern given that earlier this year ACS Exams denied requests by the University of Northern Colorado for a Braille version of an organic chemistry placement test. Though ACS claims that it is "committed to making accessibility a reality for all . . . members and other constituents, including those with disabilities,"¹ ACS Exams's recent rejection of requests for Braille seriously calls into question this commitment. Moreover, ACS Exams continues to produce a vast number of other chemistry exams that are not

¹ See <https://www.acs.org/content/acs/en/accessibility-statement.html>.

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accessible to blind students. The NFB has attempted on several occasions to discuss this matter with ACS and ACS Exams but our requests have been ignored.

When ACS Exams fails to provide Braille, tactile graphics, or other accessible formats of its tests, it puts universities such as yours at risk of violating federal law. Schools must then take necessary steps to timely emboss or remediate the exams so that students with disabilities have full and equal access to the content, as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act and Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This process of relying on Braille transcription services or university staff to translate and emboss ACS Exams's chemistry tests for one student at a time, raises questions about the resulting test's integrity, particularly for an entity that prides itself on its nationally normed, standardized tests.

Passing accessibility requirements onto its customer base is not a practice the National Federation of the Blind recommends to any entity. Per ACS Exams, it has the ability to distribute Braille versions of its tests, but has chosen not to do so. This is unacceptable; blind students must not be pushed out of their studies by tests that fail to measure their mastery of chemistry and instead measure their ability to see and read the inaccessible tests. Until ACS Exams demonstrates its willingness to distribute Braille versions of all of its tests, the NFB urges your chemistry department to forgo use of any ACS exam and to forgo membership in the American Chemical Society.

The NFB welcomes any questions you may have about our position on this matter. We are happy to direct you to our [Science and Engineering Division](#) for information on how to make chemistry accessible to blind students. Please contact Valerie Yingling, legal program coordinator, at vyingling@nfb.org for additional information.

Sincerely,



Mark A. Riccobono, President
National Federation of the Blind

MAR/vy

Cc: Kristen Murphy, Director, ACS Exams
Thomas M. Connelly Jr., Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer, ACS
Stephan Smith, Executive Director, AHEAD
John Miller, President, Science and Engineering Division of the NFB

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