July 13, 2009

Mayor Fred Eisenberger
Office of the Mayor
Hamilton City Centre
77 James Street North, Suite 230
Hamilton, ON  L8R 2K3

Dear Mayor Eisenberger:

CNIB is aware of the recent application filed by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) against City Transit for not calling all stops on city bus routes. This is an issue of great concern for people who are blind or are living with vision loss, and I wish to reinforce that stop announcements are necessary for blind transit riders to use these critical services safely.

Canadians with vision loss need reliable, accessible public transit to get to where they have to go – whether it’s for work, school, appointments or recreation. With an overwhelming disproportionate number of skilled and qualified working age adults not participating in the workforce, lack of accessible transportation was the foremost barrier identified by blind Canadians to achieving employment.

More Canadians than ever are reliant upon public transportation because of vision loss. As the population ages, eye disease will affect an increasing number of people, particularly age 65 and older. CNIB is committed to assisting this population attain active, independent lifestyles. As high utilization transit riders, they expect a service that they can enjoy equivalent with other citizens.
For many reasons, it is not sufficient for stop announcements to be provided at the request of these passengers. Even well intended drivers can make mistakes and forget to call a stop, at considerable consequence to passengers who are blind or are living with vision loss. Some passengers may be hesitant to ask for help; more may not feel that it is safe to disclose that they have a disability, particularly in a public place, and otherwise should not be expected to do so. It is reasonable for all transit users to know where they are when they are using public transit without needing to seek assistance each time they board a bus.

Given the long delay since the OHRC ruling, I urge your leadership on this matter to ensure that transit buses in Hamilton provide stop announcements immediately. Doing so protects the rights of persons with disabilities to participate in all aspects of society without impediment.

Regards,

John M. Rafferty
President and CEO
CNIB