

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2007

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SENATE BILL 199

Short Title: Accessible Electronic Info Act/Blind/Disabled. (Public)

Sponsors: Senators Dorsett; Allran, Atwater, Berger of Franklin, Berger of Rockingham, Bingham, Brown, Clodfelter, Dalton, Dannelly, Garrou, Goss, Hoyle, Jenkins, Jones, Malone, Nesbitt, Preston, Purcell, Shaw, Stevens, Swindell, Tillman, and Weinstein.

Referred to: Health Care.

February 19, 2007

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT TO MAINTAIN AN ACCESSIBLE ELECTRONIC INFORMATION SERVICE FOR BLIND AND DISABLED PERSONS AND TO APPROPRIATE FUNDS FOR THE SERVICE.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. Chapter 168 of the General Statutes is amended by adding a new Article to read:

"Article 4.

"Accessible Electronic Information Act.

"§ 168-30. Short title and findings.

(a) Short Title. – This article shall be known and may be cited as the 'Accessible Electronic Information Act'.

(b) Legislative Findings. – The General Assembly finds and declares all of the following:

(1) Thousands of citizens in the State have disabilities, including blindness or visual impairment, that prevent them from using conventional print material.

(2) The State fulfills an important responsibility by providing books and magazines prepared in Braille, audio, and large-type formats made available to blind and disabled persons.

(3) The technology, transcription methods, and means of distribution used for these materials are labor-intensive and cannot support rapid dissemination to individuals in rural and urban areas throughout the State.

(4) Lack of direct and prompt access to information included in newspapers, magazines, newsletters, schedules, announcements, or

1 other time-sensitive materials limits literacy, participation, and
2 educational opportunities for blind and disabled persons.

3 (5) This limitation can best be overcome through use of high-speed
4 computer and telecommunications technology, combined with
5 customized software, that provides a practical and cost-effective means
6 to convert electronic text-based information, including daily
7 newspapers, into synthetic speech suitable for statewide distribution
8 with modern telecommunications technology.

9 (6) Low-cost interstate telecommunications rates make distribution of
10 electronic text-based information to blind and disabled persons both
11 efficient and cost-effective for the State.

12 (7) Federal funds have been used to develop the technology and
13 infrastructure needed for statewide toll-free access to daily newspapers
14 and other timely information of local, State, and national interest,
15 providing an efficient and cost-effective means of reader registration,
16 content acquisition, and interstate telecommunications support.

17 (8) Use of this accessible electronic information service will enhance the
18 State's current efforts to meet the needs of blind and disabled persons
19 for access to information that is otherwise available in print, reducing
20 isolation and supporting full integration and equal access for these
21 persons.

22 **"§ 168-31. Definitions.**

23 The following definitions apply in this section:

24 (1) Accessible electronic information service. – A service where news and
25 other timely information, including newspapers, is provided to blind
26 and disabled persons from a multistate service center, using high-speed
27 computers and telecommunications technology for interstate
28 acquisition of content and rapid distribution in a form appropriate for
29 use by blind and disabled persons.

30 (2) Blind and disabled persons. – Those individuals who are eligible for
31 library loan services through the Library of Congress and the North
32 Carolina Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped pursuant to
33 36 C.F.R. § 701.10(b).

34 (3) Director. – The Director of the Division of Services for the Blind in
35 the Department of Health and Human Services.

36 (4) Division. – The Division of Services for the Blind in the Department
37 of Health and Human Services.

38 (5) Qualified entity. – An agency, instrumentality, or political subdivision
39 of the State or a nonprofit organization that:

40 a. Provides interstate access for blind and disabled persons to read
41 daily newspapers by producing audio editions by computer.

42 b. Provides a means of program administration or reader
43 registration on the Internet.

44 **"§ 168-32. Administration of service.**

1 The Division shall establish, operate, promote, and administer a statewide accessible
2 electronic information service. The Director shall enter into an agreement with a
3 qualified entity to provide an accessible electronic information service for blind and
4 disabled persons. The Division shall plan for continuation of the service from year to
5 year and maximize use of federal and other funds available by obtaining grant or in-kind
6 support from appropriate programs and securing access to low-cost interstate rates for
7 telecommunications by reimbursement or otherwise."

8 **SECTION 2.** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the
9 Department of Health and Human Services the sum of seventy-five thousand dollars
10 (\$75,000) for the 2007-2008 fiscal year to be used by the Division of Services for the
11 Blind of the Department of Health and Human Services to establish an accessible
12 electronic information service for blind and disabled persons in this State.

13 **SECTION 3.** This act becomes effective July 1, 2007.