

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
SESSION 2009

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SENATE BILL 226\*

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

Sponsors: Senators Dorsett; Albertson, Atwater, Bingham, Dannelly, Davis, Jenkins,  
Jones, Kinnaird, Malone, Purcell, Stevens, and Vaughan.

Referred to: Appropriations/Base Budget.

February 19, 2009

1 A BILL TO BE ENTITLED  
2 AN ACT TO ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN AN ACCESSIBLE ELECTRONIC  
3 INFORMATION SERVICE FOR BLIND AND DISABLED PERSONS AND TO  
4 APPROPRIATE FUNDS FOR THE SERVICE.

5 The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

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

8 "Article 4.

9 "Accessible Electronic Information Act.

10 "**§ 168-30. Short title and findings.**

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

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

- 15 (1) Thousands of citizens in the State have disabilities, including blindness or  
16 visual impairment, that prevent them from using conventional print material.  
17 (2) The State fulfills an important responsibility by providing books and  
18 magazines prepared in Braille, audio, and large-type formats made available  
19 to blind and disabled persons.  
20 (3) The technology, transcription methods, and means of distribution used for  
21 these materials are labor-intensive and cannot support rapid dissemination to  
22 individuals in rural and urban areas throughout the State.  
23 (4) Lack of direct and prompt access to information included in newspapers,  
24 magazines, newsletters, schedules, announcements, or other time-sensitive  
25 materials limits literacy, participation, and educational opportunities for  
26 blind and disabled persons.  
27 (5) This limitation can best be overcome through use of high-speed computer  
28 and telecommunications technology, combined with customized software,  
29 that provides a practical and cost-effective means to convert electronic  
30 text-based information, including daily newspapers, into synthetic speech  
31 suitable for statewide distribution with modern telecommunications  
32 technology.  
33 (6) Low-cost interstate telecommunications rates make distribution of electronic  
34 text-based information to blind and disabled persons both efficient and  
35 cost-effective for the State.



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

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

10 **"§ 168-31. Definitions.**

11 The following definitions apply in this section:

12           (1) Accessible electronic information service. – A service where news and other  
13 timely information, including newspapers, is provided to blind and disabled  
14 persons from a multistate service center, using high-speed computers and  
15 telecommunications technology for interstate acquisition of content and  
16 rapid distribution in a form appropriate for use by blind and disabled  
17 persons.

18           (2) Blind and disabled persons. – Those individuals who are eligible for library  
19 loan services through the Library of Congress and the North Carolina  
20 Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped pursuant to 36 C.F.R. §  
21 701.10(b).

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

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

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

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

30           b. Provides a means of program administration or reader registration on  
31 the Internet.

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

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

40           **SECTION 2.** There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of  
41 Health and Human Services the sum of seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000) for the  
42 2009-2010 fiscal year to be used by the Division of Services for the Blind within the  
43 Department of Health and Human Services to establish an accessible electronic information  
44 service for blind and disabled persons in this State.

45           **SECTION 3.** This act becomes effective July 1, 2009.