

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1838

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Government Operations & Elections, April 2, 2003

Title: An act relating to providing access to a telephonic reading service for blind or visually handicapped persons in the state of Washington.

Brief Description: Providing access to a telephonic reading service for blind or visually handicapped persons in the state of Washington.

Sponsors: House Committee on Children & Family Services (originally sponsored by Representatives Dickerson, Romero, Kenney, Kagi, Moeller, Chase and Santos).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Government Operations & Elections: 4/2/03 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Roach, Chair; Stevens, Vice Chair; Horn, Kastama and McCaslin.

Staff: Mac Nicholson (786-7445)

Background: The Department of Services for the Blind (DSB) provides a variety of programs for blind and visually impaired persons, including vocational rehabilitation and independent living programs. DSB does not currently operate a telephonic reading service; however, there is a telephonic reading service offered nationally through the National Federation for the Blind. The national service is funded by a federal grant set to expire this year.

A telephonic reading service is an electronic system that receives digital transmissions from newspapers on the morning of publication and reformats the data for conversion to synthetic speech. By dialing a toll-free number, newspapers are available to eligible persons over any touch-tone telephone.

Summary of Bill: DSB is required to provide access to a telephonic reading service for blind and disabled persons. DSB may contract for the service and expand the type of materials available on the service in order to meet the needs of blind and disabled persons in the state. DSB is instructed to establish eligibility criteria for persons seeking to use the service and inform current and potential patrons of the availability of the service.

DSB is authorized to use funds from the Business Enterprise Program account, as well as donations and grant money, to support the service.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: A telephonic reading system allows blind people to stay informed on current events and read the paper cover to cover without using readers. This system also helps blind students research events.

Testimony Against: This is not a good use of department funds. Established talking book programs should be enhanced with the money.

Testified: PRO: Representative Dickerson, prime sponsor; Mike Freeman, Josie Armantrout, David Rowlands, National Federation of Blind of WA; CON: Berl Colley, WA Council of the Blind.