

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2009

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HOUSE BILL 179*

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

Sponsors: Representatives Adams, Wiley (Primary Sponsors); M. Alexander, Faison, E. Floyd, Glazier, Harrison, Hurley, Insko, Jones, Lucas, Mackey, McLawhorn, Pierce, Wainwright, and Wray.

Referred to: Ways and Means/Broadband Connectivity, if favorable, Appropriations.

February 18, 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.



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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.