



House of Representatives
Study Committee on Programs That Provide Services for
the Reading to the Blind and the Visually Impaired

Final Report

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The Honorable Mike Cheokas
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Prepared by the House Budget & Research Office

Introduction

The House Study Committee on Programs That Provide Services for the Reading to the Blind and the Visually Impaired was created by House Resolution 979 during the 2016 Legislative Session of the Georgia General Assembly. HR 979 acknowledges that programs which provide services to the blind and visually impaired population in Georgia serve as a vital function in the educational environment in this state. These programs vary in the type of rehabilitative service and delivery method, and the services are provided through a variety of entities in different geographical locations across the state. The committee has been tasked with studying the places and programs which serve the blind and visually impaired by identifying the service area, scope, funding sources, and individual participation rates for each program. Through this study, the committee's goal is to discover whether the current programs provide adequate coverage for the blind and visually impaired population, as well as ensure that there is public awareness of the resources available in the state.

House Resolution 979 provides for the membership of the committee, consisting of seven members to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Four of these members are to be state representatives, including the chairperson of the Economic Development Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee and the chairperson of the Higher Education Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee. The three remaining members are to be the executive director of the Public Service Commission, the director of the Public Library Service of the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia, and a representative from the Center for the Visually Impaired. The Speaker appointed the following members: Representative Penny Houston, Chair; Representative Mike Cheokas, Representative Terry Rogers, Representative Jan Tankersley, Deborah Flannagan from the Public Service Commission, Julie Walker from the Georgia Public Library Service, and Anisio Correia from the Center for the Visually Impaired.

The committee held two public meetings at the State Capitol during 2016, occurring on August 17th and November 2nd. During these meetings, the committee heard testimony from multiple different entities that provide programs and services for the blind and visually impaired population. This report provides an overview of each program and is a comprehensive summary of the services currently available in Georgia.

Overview of Current Programs

Georgia Libraries for Accessible Statewide Services (GLASS)

Fund Source	FY16	FY17
State Funds	\$760,721	\$753,680
Federal Funds – LSTA (Library Services & Technology Act)	\$992,405	\$1,143,723
TOTAL	\$1,753,126	\$1,897,403

As a unit of the Georgia Public Library Service, Georgia Libraries for Accessible Statewide Services (GLASS) provides library services for individuals who are blind and for those whose physical abilities require the use of books and magazines in audio format or braille. Services are delivered through a network including two walk-in locations and a central distribution center. GLASS supports accessible library services in Georgia by promoting the use of assistive technology and by providing accessible reading materials to those who, due to a disability, are unable to read standard print.

GLASS Statistics FY2015	
Registered Users	15,593
Annual circulation (mailed)	328,640
Annual circulation (downloads)	102,991
Titles in braille and audio formats accessible	241,630
Titles available for download	99,780

Who Is Eligible for the Service?

- Anyone who is unable to read or handle standard printed materials as a result of temporary or permanent visual or physical disability.
- Persons who are legally blind or cannot see well enough or focus long enough to read standard print, even with glasses.
- Persons who are unable to hold or turn pages of print books.
- Persons who are certified by a medical doctor as having a reading disability.

What is Available?

- **Books:** Recorded and braille books from a national collection that includes a variety of popular interest writings such as bestsellers, classics, mysteries, biographies, westerns, children's books, and foreign language materials.

- **Magazines:** Library patrons can also subscribe to over 70 popular magazines such as Good Housekeeping, Sports Illustrated, and National Geographic.
- **Equipment and Accessories:** Special playback equipment is needed to listen to the books and magazines produced by the National Library Service (NLS). This equipment is lent to eligible users free of charge for as long as the individual is a user of the reading material provided by NLS and its cooperating libraries. Accessories are available which will help readers with limited mobility or hearing impairment use the equipment.
- **Book Reviews and Catalogs:** Registered borrowers learn about new books added to the collection through two bi-monthly publications, Talking Book Topics and Braille Book Review. These are available in large print, recorded, or braille format.
- **Music:** Recorded music is not available through the NLS library program. However, such material is often available from local public libraries. A collection of musical scores in braille and large print, textbooks and books about music in large print and braille, and elementary instruction for voice, piano, organ, guitar, recorder, accordion, banjo, and harmonica are available in recorded form directly from NLS.

GLASS Atlanta, the public service point, offers walk-in service for patrons and an assistive technology lab with adaptive equipment and a braille printer. Classes are taught and books clubs are offered for print-impaired readers, and GLASS Atlanta offers remote book clubs across Georgia via telephone participation. Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD), the self-service digital download service, and the recent addition of Bookshare services, another source of digital content for the print-impaired, are additional library services.

GLASS seeks to inform and educate librarians across Georgia on what it means to provide accessible library services. Its funding sponsors multiple statewide training sessions where librarians learn about issues related to access to information and leisure reading materials for all patrons in their community. Additionally, some of the funding has been used to purchase assistive technology for each Georgia public library. Online training modules have been developed to provide front-line staff with information on offering GLASS services to print-impaired readers in Georgia. GLASS has partnered with Georgia Tools for Life to create assistive technology tool kits for demonstration of resources that can make reading and accessing computerized information easier for persons with varying physical abilities. GLASS has also partnered with the PINES program to foster partnerships for lending and for identifying readers who might benefit from GLASS services.

Audible Universal Information Access Services (AUIAS)

Fund Source	FY16	FY17
Other Funds (O.C.G.A. 46-5-30)	\$204,000	\$204,000
TOTAL	\$204,000	\$204,000

In 2006, the Georgia General Assembly created a statewide Audible Universal Information Access Service (AUIAS) to provide blind and print-disabled citizens of Georgia with telephonic access to print media publications. The law gives oversight of the service to the Georgia Public Service Commission (PSC). Following a competitive bidding process, PSC selected the National Federation of the Blind to administer the service. Since June 2006, the AUIAS has provided continuous audible universal access to all Georgia telephone exchanges, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and 52 weeks a year. The system is accessible by dialing a toll-free or local number anywhere in the state and has the capacity to serve an unlimited number of subscribers. Currently, there are over 2,200 subscribers to this service; however, the total number of Georgia citizens who could potentially benefit from this service greatly exceeds this, as demonstrated by the number of current subscribers to the Georgia Library for Accessible Statewide Services.

The AUIAS program is funded through a special fund created by O.C.G.A. 46-5-30 and administered by PSC. This special fund also supports the Calling Service for the Hearing Impaired, or 711, the Hearing Aid Distribution Program, and the Telecommunications Equipment Distribution Program. Per the statute, PSC levies a small monthly charge on each local access line, or land line, to fund all of these legislatively mandated services. This fee is set at an appropriate level to fund all of these services and collects about \$3 million a year. Cell phones do not pay the charge.

Georgia Radio Reading Services

Fund Source	FY16	FY17
State Funds (pass-through from GVRA)	\$63,900	\$63,900
Federal Funds	\$236,100	\$236,100
TOTAL	\$300,000	\$300,000

As Georgia's only radio reading service, the Georgia Radio Reading Service (GaRRS) is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit closed circuit radio station with a mission to improve the quality of life for every Georgian who is blind, visually-impaired, or has difficulty with access to the printed word by broadcasting current information via sub channel radio transmission.

Through an arrangement with Georgia Public Broadcasting, GaRRS is also available online via streaming audio.

Founded in 1980, GaRRS broadcast is provided by more than 500 volunteer readers from across Georgia who deliver approximately 200 different radio shows each month, including cover-to-cover readings of magazines, newspapers, and books, population-specific programming (seniors, veterans and Hispanic/Latino news), public service announcements, and information regarding community-support programs and activities. GaRRS programs are broadcast 7 days a week, 24 hours a day by way of special sub channel (SCA) radio receivers and a password protected audio streaming link from the GaRRS website. A full periodical list and radio coverage map can be seen in the Appendix.

While GaRRS is attached to Georgia Public Broadcasting, its source of state funding comes as a pass-through from the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA). The funds are matched with federal funds to total \$300,000 annually. In addition, GaRRS is funded by general donations from businesses and individuals.

Georgia Braille Transcribers

Fund Source	FY16	FY17
State Funds	\$56,254	\$57,933
TOTAL	\$56,254	\$57,933

The Georgia Department of Corrections has a Georgia Braille Transcribers vocational program at Central State Prison. The program translates textbooks, instructional materials, and stories into braille for visually impaired students. The program began in 2003 at Scott State Prison and was shifted to Central State Prison in 2009. Approximately 21 inmates are part of the program, which had produced \$1,665,250 worth of transcriptions for the blind and sight-impaired through 2013.

Georgia Department of Education Student Services

Budget Program	FY16 State Funds	FY16 Student Count	FY17 State Funds	FY17 Student Count	Description
Curriculum – <i>Georgia Instructional Material Center</i>	\$123,000	Statewide	\$123,000	Statewide	Provides accessible educational materials to all of Georgia eligible K-12 students. \$17,000 of the total is for braille transcription services.
State Schools – <i>Georgia Academy for the Blind</i>	\$8,671,995	106	\$8,505,081	105	Serves the needs of Georgia students with visual impairments, including those with additional disabilities. In addition to the state funds, \$189,000 in other funds is used for the Smokey Powell Center for Assistive Technology.
QBE – <i>Category IV (Direct Services)</i>	\$246,961,991	11,016	\$248,417,579	11,024	Provides services for students who are deaf-blind, profoundly mentally disabled, visually impaired and blind, resourced hearing impaired and deaf, resourced orthopedically disabled, and resourced other health impaired.
TOTAL	\$255,756,986		\$257,045,660		

The Georgia Department of Education provides services for students who are blind or visually impaired through the Georgia Academy for the Blind, the Quality Basic Education (QBE) funds for direct services to students, and the Georgia Instructional Materials Center (GIMC). GIMC provides accessible educational materials to all eligible K-12 students in Georgia, as well as training to local school districts on reading accommodations and best practices on the utilization of accessible educational materials. GIMC estimates it serves over 2,700 students, with 1,663 being blind or visually impaired. The program provides books in braille, large print, and accessible digital files, as well as supplies and equipment.

Georgia Department of Public Health Chronic Disease Programs

Organization	FY16	FY17
Center for Visually Impaired	\$64,448	\$64,448
Georgia Eye Bank	\$63,000	\$63,000
Prevent Blindness Georgia (Georgia Vision Collaborative)	\$104,400	\$104,400
TOTAL	\$231,848	\$231,848

The Department of Public Health’s Chronic Disease section funds three organizations to address vision and eye health across the state. The three organizations, Georgia Eye Bank, Georgia Vision Collaborative, and Prevent Blindness Georgia, provide regional and community-based vision health and blindness education, vision screening and examinations, rehabilitation and treatment services, and the gift of sight through eye donations. The funded organizations also provide education around healthy vision and eye disease, vision education activities, training of volunteers, and referral of patients for any necessary follow up services. While Prevent Blindness Georgia does provide reading services to the blind or visually impaired, the service may not be supported specifically with the funding provided by the Department of Public Health.

Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency

The Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) was created in 2012 with the goal of helping people with disabilities to become fully productive members of society by achieving independence and meaningful employment. GVRA estimates that there are 261,300 individuals in Georgia that are blind or have a visual impairment, with 94,700 of them over the age of 65.

Through agency rehabilitation counselors and a network of private providers, GVRA provides blindness rehabilitation, which is a specialized training designed to teach a person who is blind or visually impaired adaptive techniques in order to live and work in a sighted world. The services in this rehabilitation program include counseling, referral, low vision evaluation, braille instruction, vision rehabilitation therapy, orientation and mobility instruction, assistive work technology evaluation, and technology access training. Through this rehabilitation, GVRA estimates over 100 individuals who are blind or have low vision return to work each year, with job examples including computer software engineer, high school science teacher, lawyer, massage therapist, and court supervisor.

Additionally, the agency has two unique programs that serve consumers with visual impairments: the Business Enterprise Program and the Georgia Industries for the Blind. The

Business Enterprise Program provides entrepreneurial opportunities to people who are blind and want to manage small businesses such as vending machine routes, snack bars, cafes/grilles, and full service cafeterias. There are currently over 130 locations operated by over 70 blind vendors across Georgia. The Georgia Industries for the Blind program provides jobs in manufacturing, packaging, and services for individuals who are blind. There are currently three primary facilities in Georgia, located in Bainbridge, Griffin, and Robins Air Force Base, with annual sales averaging \$10 million due to federal government contracts.

Center for the Visually Impaired

The Center for the Visually Impaired (CVI), located in Atlanta, is Georgia's largest comprehensive, fully accredited private facility providing rehabilitation services for the blind and visually impaired. The Center serves over 5,000 people annually, with the goal of providing skills, support, and hope for people with vision loss so that they can live independent lives. CVI offers specialized programs that provide vital services to clients from around Metro Atlanta and throughout the state and cover every stage of life.

The Center's BEGIN program for newborn and preschool-aged children with severe visual impairments provides essential services to enhance development, including individual vision rehabilitation, group classes, parent support groups, and family activities. CVI's STARS programs for ages five to 21 is an educational, recreational, and social skills program that includes participation in after school programs, summer camps, mentoring programs, and weekend social and recreational activities. Lastly, the New View adult rehabilitation services program aims to help adult clients achieve greater independence at home and work through classes on topics such as safe travel, independent living skills, braille, computer technology, communication skills, career services, and job readiness and placement.

CVI is also home to the Florence Maxwell Low Vision Clinic. The clinic serves ages five and older through comprehensive low-vision evaluations, optical and non-optical training, counseling, and assistance referrals. Additionally, the VisAbility Store is located on the first floor of the CVI building and is a nonprofit retail shop that provides access to low vision aids, assistive technology, and other adaptive devices.

AMAC Accessibility Solutions and Research Center

AMAC Accessibility was developed by the University System of Georgia in 2005 in order to help post-secondary disability services offices provide complete, timely, and efficient accommodations to print-disabled students so that the students can be more independent and productive in their academic environments. The research and service center is part of the Georgia Tech College of Design and its services include accessible digital content, braille,

captioning, assistive technology evaluations, web evaluations, and information and communications technology (ICT) instruction and research. The tables below show the amount of material produced by AMAC during previous academic years.

Accessible Materials Produced Internally (Estimated Number of Pages)									
	2012-2013			2013-2014			2014-2015		
Material	Textbooks	Exams	Other	Textbooks	Exams	Other	Textbooks	Exams	Other
Electronic Text	177,318	2,887	1,510	272,590	8,489	20,000	298,788	300,624	501,000
Braille	0	7	0	0	505	1,872	0	0	0
Audio	23,673	403	0	17,806	450	0	10,765	357	0
Large Print	1,435	4,920	115	3,605	2,608	2,500	4,811	2,005	1,000

Accessible Materials Outsourced (Estimated Number of Pages)									
	2012-2013			2013-2014			2014-2015		
Material	Textbooks	Exams	Other	Textbooks	Exams	Other	Textbooks	Exams	Other
Electronic Text	919,003	0	0	2,220,897	237	20	574,877	1	0
Braille	4,647	513	57	2,235	567	185	7,230	325	40
Audio	52,402	2	0	62,439	11	0	113,858	0	0
Large Print	199	0	0	4,714	237	0	0	0	2

Committee Recommendations

The HR 979 Study Committee has reviewed all of the information provided by the aforementioned programs and believes that there are adequate resources available in Georgia for those that need them. Furthermore, due to the availability of federal funds, other funds, and private and non-profit resources, the cost to the state for these services is on par with the programs being provided and the number of people the programs can serve.

However, the committee feels that there is insufficient awareness of the available resources compared to the number of potential citizens in Georgia who are blind or visually impaired. Georgia's programs for the blind and visually impaired are currently all siloed in each individual agency or nonprofit, making it difficult for consumers to find all of the available services. The committee would like to see an improvement in the access to this information on a statewide scale.

With this, the House Study Committee on Programs that Provide Services for the Reading to the Blind and the Visually Impaired recommends that a centralized website be created to provide information, links, and connection to services for all Georgians who are blind or visually impaired. On this site, a consumer would be able to find an overview of the services available both in Georgia and in their specific geographical area, points of contact for programs and services, and information and links to accessible news and reading sites. This website is meant as a one-stop shop for all resources related to blindness and visual impairment in Georgia. The committee recommends that the Georgia Public Library Service be responsible for the development of this site, whether through the expansion of already existing resources or through new site development. In addition, the committee recommends that the Georgia Public Library Service inquire about any federal or private grants available for the development of this site, if additional funding is necessary, prior to any request for state funds.

The study committee believes that by better promoting the resources already available in the state, more blind or visually impaired Georgians would be able to find the services and assistive programs they need to live independent lives.

Mr. Speaker, these are the findings and recommendations of your Study Committee on Programs that Provide Services for the Reading to the Blind and the Visually Impaired.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Penny Houston", written in black ink. The signature is positioned above a horizontal line.

**The Honorable Penny Houston,
Representative, 170th District,
Chairwoman**

Prepared By:
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Appendix

A. Georgia Radio Reading Service Periodical List

Newspapers

Albany Herald
Americus Times-Reader
Athens Banner Herald
Atlanta Inquirer
Bainbridge Post Searchlight
Berrien Press
Brookhaven Reporter
Brunswick News
Clayton News Daily
Clinch County News
Cochran Journal
Columbus Ledger Inquirer
Columbus Times
Creative Loafing
Dalton Daily Citizen
DeKalb Neighbor
Dublin Courier Herald
Dunwoody Crier
East Cobb Neighbor
Gainesville Times
Houston Home Journal
Marietta Daily Journal
Milledgeville Union Recorder
Northeast Georgian
Northside Neighbor
Rome News-Tribune
Sandy Springs Neighbor
Statesboro Herald
Waycross Journal Herald

Magazines

ACB Reports
AJC
Alfred Hitchcock
American Cowboy Magazine
American History
American Spectator
America's Civil War

Analog Science Fiction and Fact
Archaeology
Atlanta Latino Newspapers
Atlanta Magazine
Atlanta Review
Autoweek
Backpacker
Berkeley Wellness Letter
Better Homes and Gardens
Black Enterprise
Bloomberg Business Week
Blues Revue
Bon Appetit
Braille Monitor
BVA Magazine
Car and Driver
Christian Science Monitor
Civil War Times
Computing
Conde Nast Traveler
Consumer Reports
Consumers Digest
Cooking Light
Cooks
Cosmopolitan
Country Weekly
Dialogue
Discover Magazine
Ebony
Ellery Queen
Entertainment Weekly
Esquire
Essence
Fantasy and Science Fiction
Food and Wine
Forbes
Fortune
Georgia Review
Georgia Trend

Go Green
Golf World
Good Housekeeping
Harvard Health Letter
Health
Hudson Review
Inc.
Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction
Jazz Times
John Hopkins Health after 50
Ladies Home Journal
Mayo Clinic Health Letter
Men's Health
Money
More
Mother Jones
Motor Trend
Mundo Hispanico
National Enquirer
National Geographic
National Geographic Traveler
National Review
New Republic
New Yorker
Newsweek
Oprah
Outside
Oxygen
PC
PC World
People Magazine
Popular Mechanics
Popular Science
Prevention
Psychology Today

Reader's Digest
Real Simple
Rolling Stone
Saturday Evening Post
Savoy
Science News
Scientific American
Self
Senior News
Senior Scene
Smart Business Atlanta
Smart Money
Smithsonian
Southern Living
Sports Illustrated
Taste of Home
The American Scholar
The Nation Magazines
The New York Times Book Review
The Week
The Weekly Standard
The Wilson Quarterly
Time
Travel and Leisure
Tufts University
TV Guide
Upscale
US Weekly
Vanity Fair
Vegetarian Times
Vegetarian Times
Washington Examiner
Whole Living
Wired
Women's Health

