

Details:

Bill: HB-2: General Appropriations Act 2021-02-08 09:00 AM - (H) JAS on Education

Position: Proponent

Representing an Entity/Another Person: Yes

Organization: National Federation of the Blind of Montana

Name: Joy Breslauer

Email: breslauerj@gmail.com

Phone: (406) 454-3096

City, State: Great Falls, MT

Written Statement: Mr. Chairman and members of the committee:

My name is Joy Breslauer from Great Falls. I am writing to acquaint you with NFB-Newsline, an audio news and information service available over the phone for those who are blind and otherwise print-disabled, and to ask for funding for this indispensable service.

I am also the first vice president of the National Federation of the Blind of Montana, which I will explain below.

Founded in 1940 in Pennsylvania by seven members from eight states, the National Federation of the Blind is now the largest and most influential consumer and advocacy organization of the blind in the United States, with a nationwide membership of over fifty thousand, and affiliates in all fifty states as well as Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. The NFB improves the lives of blind people through advocacy, education, research, technology, and programs encouraging independence and self-confidence. The NFB works toward the removal of legal, economic, and social barriers to full participation by blind people in all aspects of community life. We are not an organization speaking for the blind; we are the blind speaking for ourselves.

Probably 25 years ago or so, the National Federation of the Blind pioneered a free audio news service for anyone who is blind, low-vision, deafblind, or otherwise print-disabled, that offers access to more than 500 publications, emergency weather alerts, job listings, and more over a standard telephone line or cell phone, as well as now on the internet, called NFB-Newsline.

NFB-NEWSLINE subscribers have access to:

- National newspapers, including the Wall Street Journal and USA Today
- Breaking news sources, including CNN, BBC, and ESPN Online
- International newspapers, including Financial Times and Vancouver Sun
- Magazines, including Time, Consumer Reports, Guideposts, and Smithsonian
- State newspapers, including the Billings Gazette, the Great Falls Tribune, the Missoulian, the Bozeman Daily Chronicle, the Helena Independent Record, and the Butte Standard.
- Emergency weather alerts and seven-day forecasts localized to your zip code or GPS location
- The information that scrolls along the bottom of your television screen during emergency alerts
- More than 100,000 job listings from two national job sources
- TV listings localized to your zip code and provider
- Retail ads

Anyone who cannot read printed publications due to vision loss, dyslexia, or a physical disability is eligible to receive NFB-NEWSLINE. You may register by calling your state's Library for the Blind and Print Disabled to request an application or to fill one out over the phone. After your registration is processed, you will receive a message containing your activation codes and instructions.

NFB-Newsline is great for Seniors who cannot read the paper anymore and don't have a computer, but already know how to use the phone and probably have one.

NFB-Newsline is free to subscribers, but it has an annual cost, which the NFB of Montana has been seeking funding for or trying to fund itself. Most recently, NFB-Newsline was being funded by a program through Blind and Low Vision Services, a department of Health and Human Services, (DPHHS), but we lost that funding in late September, 2019, and have thus lost this service which is so important to us in Montana. We would like to see NFB Newsline funded at an annual cost of around sixty thousand dollars, \$38 thousand for operating expenses and \$20 thousand or so for advertising and administrative costs.

Currently, 38 states have NFB Newsline, and 12 are funding it through MTAP. To not have access to NFB-Newsline during the pandemic is a real hardship, especially when we are so isolated already.

- NFB-NEWSLINE, a free audio news service for anyone who is blind, low-vision, deafblind, or otherwise print-disabled that offers access to more than 500 publications, emergency weather alerts, job listings, and more.

This email is primarily meant to acquaint you with what NFB-Newsline is, how it works, and how important and urgent it is to find more permanent funding to sustain it. This is not just a want or a nice thing to have; for many of us it is a necessity and a priority, and gives us access to information we cannot get any other way.

I urge you to consider funding NFB-Newsline as part of the Montana State Library appropriations. Thank you.