

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
SESSION 2003

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SENATE BILL 975  
Health & Human Resources Committee Substitute Adopted 4/30/03

Short Title: Accessible Electronic Info Act/Blind/Disab'd.

(Public)

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Sponsors:

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Referred to:

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April 3, 2003

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT TO ESTABLISH AN ACCESSIBLE ELECTRONIC INFORMATION  
SERVICE FOR BLIND AND DISABLED PERSONS.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

**SECTION 1.** Article 7 of Chapter 62 of the General Statutes is amended by  
adding a new section to read:

**"§ 62-157A. Accessible Electronic Information Act.**

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

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

(1) Thousands of citizens in the State have disabilities, including blindness  
or visual impairment, that prevent them from using conventional print  
material.

(2) The State fulfills an important responsibility by providing books and  
magazines prepared in Braille, audio, and large-type formats made  
available to eligible blind and disabled persons.

(3) The technology, transcription methods, and means of distribution used  
for these materials are labor-intensive and cannot support rapid  
dissemination to individuals in rural and urban areas throughout the  
State.

(4) Lack of direct and prompt access to information included in  
newspapers, magazines, newsletters, schedules, announcements, or  
other time-sensitive materials limits literacy, participation, and  
educational opportunities for blind and disabled persons.

(5) This limitation can best be overcome through use of high-speed  
computer and telecommunications technology, combined with  
customized software, that provides a practical and cost-effective means  
to convert electronic text-based information, including daily

- 1 newspapers, into synthetic speech suitable for statewide distribution  
2 with modern telecommunications technology.
- 3 (6) Low-cost interstate telecommunications rates make distribution of  
4 electronic text-based information to eligible users both efficient and  
5 cost-effective for the State.
- 6 (7) Federal funds have been used to develop the technology and  
7 infrastructure needed for statewide toll-free access to daily newspapers  
8 and other timely information of local, State, and national interest  
9 through a service known as NFB-NEWSLINE®, providing an efficient  
10 and cost-effective means of reader registration, content acquisition,  
11 and interstate telecommunications support.
- 12 (8) Use of this accessible electronic information service will enhance the  
13 State's current efforts to meet the needs of blind and disabled citizens  
14 for access to information that is otherwise available in print, thereby  
15 reducing isolation and supporting full integration and equal access for  
16 these individuals.
- 17 (c) Definitions. – The following definitions apply in this section:
- 18 (1) Accessible electronic information service. – A service where news and  
19 other timely information, including newspapers, is provided to eligible  
20 individuals from a multistate service center, using high-speed  
21 computers and telecommunications technology for interstate  
22 acquisition of content and rapid distribution in a form appropriate for  
23 use by blind and disabled persons.
- 24 (2) Director. – The Director of the Division of Services for the Blind in  
25 the Department of Health and Human Services.
- 26 (3) Eligible blind and disabled persons. – Those individuals who are  
27 eligible for library loan services through the Library of Congress and  
28 the North Carolina Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped  
29 pursuant to 36 C.F.R. § 701.10(b).
- 30 (4) Qualified entity. – An agency, instrumentality, or political subdivision  
31 of the State or a nonprofit organization that:
- 32 a. Provides interstate access for eligible persons to read daily  
33 newspapers producing audio editions by computer.
- 34 b. Provides a means of program administration or reader  
35 registration on the Internet.
- 36 (d) Administration of Service. – The Division of Services for the Blind shall  
37 administer the statewide accessible electronic information service, including its  
38 establishment, operation, and promotion. The Director shall enter into an agreement  
39 with a qualified entity to provide an accessible electronic information service for  
40 eligible blind and disabled persons. The Division of Services for the Blind shall plan for  
41 continuation of the service from year to year and make maximum use of federal and  
42 other funds available by obtaining grant or in-kind support from appropriate programs,  
43 including the Telecommunications Relay Service under G.S. 62-157, and securing

1 access to low-cost interstate rates for telecommunications by reimbursement or  
2 otherwise.

3 (e) Accessible Electronic Information Service Fund. – In order to support an  
4 accessible electronic information service for blind and disabled persons:

5 (1) The Commission shall require all local exchange telecommunications  
6 companies to impose a periodic surcharge on bills rendered to all local  
7 exchange telecommunications company subscribers.

8 (2) The Commission, in consultation with the Director, shall annually  
9 determine the amount of the surcharge based on the amount of funding  
10 necessary to support the accessible electronic information service.

11 (3) The amount of the surcharge may be computed as a portion of any  
12 other surcharge required under existing law. In no event shall the  
13 surcharge exceed any existing surcharge by more than one cent (1¢)  
14 each line each month.

15 (4) Local exchange telecommunications companies shall remit the amount  
16 received from the surcharge to the Director less any amounts allowed  
17 for administration in accordance with a schedule determined by the  
18 Commission in consultation with the Director.

19 (f) Power to Regulate. – The Commission shall have the same power to regulate  
20 the operation of the accessible electronic information service as it has to regulate any  
21 public utility subject to the provisions of this Chapter."

22 **SECTION 2.** This act is effective when it becomes law.