

By: Representatives Clarke, Brown, Coleman (29th), Coleman (65th), Ellington, Espy, Fillingane, Fredericks, Harrison, Mayo, Thomas, Wells-Smith, Fleming

To: Public Health and Welfare; Appropriations

HOUSE BILL NO. 1541

1 AN ACT TO ESTABLISH A TELEPHONIC READING SERVICES PROGRAM FOR  
2 BLIND AND DISABLED PERSONS, WHICH SHALL BE ADMINISTERED BY THE  
3 DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION SERVICES; TO PROVIDE THAT THIS  
4 SERVICE SHALL BE AVAILABLE TO BLIND AND DISABLED PERSONS WHO ARE  
5 ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE SPECIALIZED LIBRARY SERVICES PROVIDED THROUGH  
6 REGIONAL LIBRARIES DESIGNATED BY THE NATIONAL LIBRARY SERVICE FOR  
7 THE BLIND AND PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED OF THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS;  
8 TO AUTHORIZE THE PROVISION OF THIS SERVICE THROUGH A CONTRACT OR  
9 AGREEMENT WITH A QUALIFIED ENTITY; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

10 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

11 **SECTION 1.** This act may be known and shall be cited as the  
12 "Telephonic Reading Act."

13 **SECTION 2.** The Legislature finds and declares all of the  
14 following:

15 (a) Thousands of citizens in the state have  
16 disabilities (including blindness or visual impairment) that  
17 prevent them from using conventional print material.

18 (b) Governmental and nonprofit organizations provide  
19 specialized materials, including books and magazines prepared in  
20 braille, audio and large-type formats.

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

25 (d) Lack of direct and prompt access to information  
26 included in newspapers, magazines, newsletters, schedules,  
27 announcements and other time-sensitive materials, limits  
28 educational opportunities, literacy and full participation in  
29 society by blind and disabled persons.



30 (e) Creation and storage of information by computer  
31 results in electronic files used for publishing and distribution.

32 (f) The use of high-speed computer and  
33 telecommunications technology combined with customized software  
34 provides a practical and cost-effective means to convert  
35 electronic text-based information (including daily newspapers)  
36 into synthetic speech suitable for mass distribution by telephone.

37 (g) Recent reductions in telephone rates (particularly  
38 for high-volume, interstate service) make telephonic distribution  
39 of electronic text-based information to eligible users both  
40 efficient and cost-effective for the state.

41 (h) Federal funds are available to support statewide  
42 toll-free access to daily newspapers and other timely information  
43 of local, state and national interest through a service known as  
44 Newslite, providing an efficient and cost-effective means of  
45 reader registration, content acquisition and interstate  
46 telecommunications support.

47 (i) Telephonic distribution of time-sensitive  
48 information (including daily newspapers) will enhance the state's  
49 current efforts to meet the needs of blind and disabled citizens  
50 for access to information that is otherwise available in print,  
51 thereby reducing isolation and supporting full integration and  
52 equal access for such individuals.

53 **SECTION 3.** As used in this act, the following terms have the  
54 following meanings, unless otherwise indicated:

55 (a) "Director of telephonic reading services" means the  
56 Executive Director of the State Department of Rehabilitation  
57 Services.

58 (b) "Qualified entity" means an agency,  
59 instrumentality, or political subdivision of the state or a  
60 nonprofit organization that provides audio reproduction of daily  
61 newspapers and other timely information of local, state and



62 national interest through telephone access using computer and  
63 telecommunications technology.

64 (c) "Telephonic reading service" means audio  
65 information provided by telephone, including the acquisition and  
66 distribution of daily newspapers and other information of local,  
67 state or national interest.

68 **SECTION 4.** The director of telephonic reading services shall  
69 provide access to a telephonic reading service for blind and  
70 disabled individuals who are eligible to receive specialized  
71 library services provided through regional libraries designated by  
72 the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically  
73 Handicapped of the Library of Congress. This service shall be  
74 planned for continuation from year to year and administered  
75 through a contract or agreement with a qualified entity. The  
76 director shall secure appropriate arrangements, including grant  
77 support from appropriate programs and obtaining financial support  
78 for telecommunication costs, by reimbursement or otherwise, in  
79 order to make maximum use of federal and other funds available.

80 **SECTION 5.** This act shall take effect and be in force from  
81 and after July 1, 2002.

