

Department of Fiscal Services
Maryland General Assembly

FISCAL NOTE
Revised

Senate Bill 811 (Senators Della and Roesser)
Economic and Environmental Affairs

Blind or Visually Impaired Individuals - Information Technology - Access

This bill requires State agencies and State assisted organizations to provide specified blind or visually impaired individuals with defined access to and use of information technology that is equal to that provided to fully sighted individuals. The bill creates an 11-member Blind or Visually Impaired Individuals' Technology Access Board to (1) establish general performance standards; (2) recommend procurement specifications; (3) provide advice and technical assistance; and (4) evaluate information technology. All State contracts for the purchase of information technology must include a technology access clause which states that the technology must provide access to blind or visually impaired individuals and have the capability to be integrated into networks.

The bill does not require the installation of nonvisual access at a station primarily used by a fully sighted person. It also specifies that equipment purchased before the bill's effective date must achieve compliance when the equipment is upgraded or replaced.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Indeterminate. General fund expenditures could increase significantly as a result of the requirements of the bill. Revenues would not be affected.

Local Effect: Indeterminate. Expenditures could increase significantly as a result of the requirements of the bill. Revenues would not be affected.

Small Business Effect: None. Small businesses would not be directly affected.

Fiscal Analysis

State Expenditures: The Department of Budget and Management (DBM), which oversees expenditures for information technology systems for State agencies, advises that providing blind or visually impaired individuals with access to and use of information technology that is equal to that technology provided to fully sighted individuals would cost approximately \$1.72 million in fiscal 1998. DBM notes that while many agencies are already providing assistance to visually impaired individuals, the legislation is likely to impact an estimated 20 of the over 60 State agencies. These agencies will require additional personnel, equipment, contractual services and programming time. Thus, DBM's estimate includes 20 full-time programmers, fringe benefits, contractual costs, equipment, and ongoing maintenance and enhancements adjusted for the October 1, 1997 effective date.

For purposes of further illustration, the University of Maryland advises it would require \$302,800 to provide blind or visually impaired individuals with access to and use of information technology that technology provided to fully sighted individuals. The estimate includes one full-time staff, contractual costs, and \$242,000 in additional equipment.

The Department of Fiscal Services (DFS) advises that while it is difficult to precisely quantify the bill's effect on State expenditures, the increase will be significant. The cost to modify a workstation to provide access for blind or visually impaired individuals varies greatly depending on the type of access required and the application being accessed. Thus, State expenditures cannot be reliably estimated at this time.

For informational purposes, the following are cost estimates for some of the equipment that may be required to meet the specifications of the bill, as assessed by the Motor Vehicle Administration:

- A video adapter, depending on the degree of magnification and the type of application: \$79 to \$2,000 per workstation
- A "talking screen" or screen review capability make information on the screen available through either synthesized speech or braille: \$595 to \$2,200 for the software only
- Voice input utilities provide the capability to talk to the computer instead of typing: \$250 to \$1,000

Local Expenditures: Localities would experience an indeterminate, but significant increase in expenditures as a result of the bill's requirement that blind and visually impaired

individuals have access to and use of information technology that is equal to that provided to fully sighted individuals, as discussed in the State Expenditures section.

Information Source(s): Department of Budget and Management, University of Maryland, Department of General Services, Department of Fiscal Services

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