

National Federation of the Blind (NFB) Newsline Fact Sheet

Overview

The NFB Newsline is an important independent living (IL) media information tool utilized by blind and visually-impaired individuals and, generally, those who are print-challenged. It is comprised of:

1. A phone line service
2. A mobile app
3. A Web page portal

The NFB Newsline, via various channels, accesses:

1. Timely news and sports
2. Multiple national and state (and international) newspapers
3. Regional/local weather
4. Multiple national/state/international magazines
5. Job listings and other classified listings
6. More

In addition, upon sponsorship by a state, a state-specific channel is made available for use, for example, by state agencies to post important and timely information to citizens.

It is made available free to those who require and can benefit from the service.

Background

Vermont paid for this service by a combination of a grant through the State Library Special Services with some supplemental funding by the Division of Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI). The grant ended and supplemental funding was insufficient to pay the cost of maintaining the service. The Vermont NFB Newsline Service was discontinued the end of March 2015.

Upon advocacy by many who had utilized the Vermont service, the VT Department of Disability, Aging and IL (DAIL) decided to prioritize renewal of funding for the NFB Newsline.

It is thought best to find both an appropriate and a *sustainable* source of funding – one that would not be subject to budgetary oscillations. Thus, it has been proposed to utilize the Universal Service Fund (USF) for that purpose.

DAIL has worked with the VT Public Service Department (PSD) and subsequently has proposed language for legislation to renew funding through the USF. The draft request is currently with legislative council and a bill will be introduced shortly, prior to the 2016 deadline.

Cost: Approximately \$24,000 annually. It is thought the USF will be able to absorb the cost without a fee rise or a negative effect upon any other program that it encompasses.

Currently, 45 states plus the District of Columbia fund the Newslines (all but one with state funding). Approximately 10 of the states utilize their USF (including our NH neighbors).

Points to Highlight

1. By utilizing this IL media informational tool, many state citizens will be better equipped to live independently, in productive and self-sufficient mode. The Newslines, for example, facilitates employment objectives.
2. By estimate, approximately, 13,800+ Vermonters have vision-related or other type of impairment which precludes reading newsprint or similar hard copy.
3. Vermont's population is aging. In turn, aging often entails visual impairment. It is thus thought that greater utilization of the Newslines will benefit Vermont's elders.
4. As opposed to the need to search various Websites with the use of unreliable and often incompatible screen readers, *all info is available with Newslines services in one place*: one phone line/number, one mobile app, one Website. It is user-friendly and cost-effective.
5. It is time for Vermont to re-join the 45 other states and DC that fund the Newslines, making this tool available to those who will utilize it to improve their lives.