



VERMONT ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED  
*HELPING ACHIEVE INDEPENDENCE IN A VISUAL WORLD SINCE 1926*

May 4, 2020

Dear Members of the Senate Appropriations,

As we cope with the new realities of dealing with a pandemic, everyone has had to change how they deal with their family, friends, co-workers and the public in general. One thing that has been brought out repeatedly is that many people are feeling isolated and the effect that this has had on their health and mental wellbeing.

For our clients that are visually impaired, this is nothing new. The Coronavirus however, has made it even tougher for them. They cannot leave their homes, and family members cannot visit. Their isolation issues have increased, especially if they have not had training on their iPhone, iPad or other devices that can greatly increase their accessibility to the outside world that most of us rely on during this time.

For the past few years we have requested funding for this type of training. It is now more important than ever! As the experts say, there can be resurgences, and no one is sure when a vaccine will be available. We can do a fair amount of the training remotely, and can follow up with in-person visits when Governor Scott eases up the restrictions.

Please support our request detailed in the documents submitted, as we feel this is a critical need for our visually impaired neighbors. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Steven P. Pouliot  
Executive Director

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## TALKING POINTS

1. The Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (VABVI) helps Vermonters with a vision problem to stay independent and remain in their community. National statistics for our type of services says that without them,
  - a. They are 15 times more likely than other seniors to end up in a nursing home.
  - b. They are 17 times more likely to fall and break a leg than other seniors.
2. We actually save the State money. Our services cost less than \$1000 a year per client. A nursing home costs \$70,000 a year. Many of our clients express their concerns that they will end up in a nursing home due to their vision loss. By the end of our services, 98% of those who had those concerns say they no longer have that fear. But they do in many cases face loneliness and isolation
3. One of things that we would like to teach our clients are all of the accessibility features and helpful apps on their iPhone, iPad and other android devices that would significantly improve their quality of life.
4. Think about how much you and I use these devices – they are such a part of our lives that we don't even think about it – or how much we rely on them.
5. Now what would happen if you lost your vision? How could you make phone calls, check your calendars, download apps, googling information, going on the internet and the many other things that we do every day. This is what our clients experience when they cannot see.
6. The consequences of isolation and loneliness are severe- negative health outcomes and higher health care costs are very likely. It is more dangerous to our health researchers tell us, than obesity and is the equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes a day.
7. With Vermont's aging demographics, we need help to support this service.
8. Most elders want to stay in their community and to stay independent and connected to their family, friends, community and the rest of the world. Please help our visually impaired neighbors to do this by funding this program with \$100,000 to provide this valuable service.



VERMONT ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED  
*HELPING ACHIEVE INDEPENDENCE IN A VISUAL WORLD SINCE 1926*

Dear members of the Appropriations Committee,

The Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (VABVI) has served Vermonters since 1926. We are the only non-profit in the State to offer rehabilitation services to the blind and visually impaired. Our mission is to enable Vermonters with vision problems to achieve and maintain their independence. Towards that end, we have provided independent living skills training, orientation and mobility, adaptive equipment and materials, volunteer drivers, low vision evaluations, and produced written materials in braille, audiotape and large print format. Enclosed is our latest fact sheet, and other information that tells you more about VABVI and the services we provide.

. There are an estimated 14,000 Vermonters who are currently blind or visually impaired. As the “Baby Boomer” generation ages however; this number is expected to increase to 24,000 or higher by 2030. As a result, our neighbors, parents, family and friends are among those who may be coping with a vision loss.

If you spoke to our clients, they would tell you how important our services are to them. Approximately 20% of our clients, (one in six) express concerns when they first contact us that they fear that they might have to move into a nursing home. If anything, that percentage is low as many do not want to admit to that fear. For the number of elderly adults that we currently serve, 20% is about 170 people. For those clients whom VABVI has completed providing services, about 98% of those who had expressed that concern are now confident that they could live independently in their current living situation and continue to lead fulfilling lives regardless of their vision loss.

One service we haven't offered due to our limited resources is to provide technology training on iOS devices to our clients. Adults with disabilities tend to spend twice the amount of time online as adults without disabilities. They also report that smartphones, iPads, and the internet have significantly improved their quality of life. Our clients have asked for this training, as it is more affordable than computers with the associated assistive software since many accessibility features have been incorporated into the phones and tablets.

We performed a six month pilot project in 2018 due to some very generous one-time support from a few foundations that support us. Our reports showed that we have achieved very good outcomes with the clients that participated (see the attached sheet). We trained 51 people out of the 78 that were approached to be part of the pilot. With limited time, we were not able to help all who expressed an interest. We were able to attain some additional funding from some additional foundations for 2019, but had to cut by 50% the hours that we could put into the program due to the decrease in funding. We will have to cut the program even more in 2020 if we do not receive some support from the State for FY21.

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We ask therefore, for the State to increase our appropriation by \$100,000 for the continuation and expansion of our services with the addition of this iOS technology training. We would will continue to subsidize our other services, but we need your help to offer these new services. While vision loss could be seen in a negative light, the stories of success and accomplishment from VABVI's clients highlight the "can-do" attitude and joy of life that is present regardless of their vision levels. From skiing to artwork, a walk in their neighborhood or cooking a meal at home, our clients demonstrate that the only limiting factor to what can be done is their imagination.

Please join us in keeping our clients independent and contributing members of our society. I appreciate your consideration in this critical area of need.

Sincerely,



Steven P. Pouliot  
Executive Director

VERMONT ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND  
AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED  
NEEDS STATEMENT

The Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired has served Vermonters since 1926. Our mission is to enable Vermonters with vision problems to achieve and maintain independence. Towards that end; we have provided skills training, adaptive equipment and materials, volunteer drivers, low vision evaluations, and have produced written materials in braille, audiotape and large print format.

Providing these supports to the visually impaired costs less than \$1000 per client annually. Compared to the cost of a nursing home, (which is 15 times more likely when a senior citizen becomes visually impaired) this program is very cost effective, and we actually save the State money by keeping them independent and in their homes. As our population ages, their need of our services has also increased. For those who are 75 and older, one in four will experience some form of vision impairment. For FY21 we are asking the State to help us in the following area.

One service we haven't offered due to our limited resources is to provide technology training for the visually impaired. Adults with disabilities tend to spend twice the amount of time online as adults without disabilities. They also report that smartphones, Ipads and the internet has significantly improved the quality of their lives. Our clients have asked for this training as it is more affordable than computers with the associated assistive software since many accessibility features have been incorporated into the phones and tablets.

We performed a six month pilot project in 2018 due to some very generous one-time support from a few foundations that support us. Our reports showed that we have achieved very good outcomes with the clients that participated. We trained 51 people out of the 78 that were approached to be part of the pilot. With limited time, we were not able to help all who expressed an interest. We were able to attain some additional funding from some additional foundations for 2019, but had to cut by 50% the hours that we could put into the program due to the decrease in funding. We will have to cut the program even more in 2020 if we do not receive some support from the State for FY21.

We ask therefore, for the State to increase our appropriation by \$100,000 for the continuation and expansion of our services and the addition of technology assistance. This is still less than \$1000 per client per year. We will continue to subsidize our services, but need your help to offer these new services. Please join us in keeping our clients independent, connected, and contributing members of our society.