

FISCAL IMPACT OF PROPOSED LEGISLATION

Measure: SB 111 - A

Seventy-Sixth Oregon Legislative Assembly – 2011 Regular Session
Legislative Fiscal Office

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Measure Description:

Establishes statewide audio newspaper service for individuals who are blind or print-disabled.

Government Unit(s) Affected:

Oregon State Library, Public Utility Commission (PUC), Commission for the Blind

Summary of Expenditure Impact

	2011-13 Biennium	2013-15 Biennium
Other Funds	93,649	84,849
Total Funds	\$93,649	\$84,849
Positions	0	0
FTE	0.00	0.00

Local Government Mandate:

This bill does not affect local governments' service levels or shared revenues sufficient to trigger Section 15, Article XI of the Oregon Constitution.

Analysis:

The proposed legislation would require that the Public Utility Commission (PUC) provide a statewide audio newspaper service administered by the State Library with assistance from the Commission for the Blind. The service provides blind and print-disabled access to newspapers, magazines and television listings using a touch-tone telephone or by digital download. The service proposed by the State Library and the Commission for the Blind consists of access to the NFB-Newsline national library service provided by the National Federation of the Blind, toll-free access lines and telecommunication infrastructure, and access to six in-state newspapers. Although the bill specifies that the Public Utilities Commission shall provide the statewide audio newspaper service, the measure does not stipulate the level of funding or the specific features of the service.

The measure proposes to expand the existing service and to replace the existing funding. The State Library, in conjunction with the Commission for the Blind is currently operating an audio newspaper service. The funding for the service in the current biennium has been from donated funds in the amount of \$25,179 split equally between the Commission for the Blind and the State Library. The total cost of the expanded service proposed by the State Library and the Commission for the Blind is \$118,828 Other Funds in the 2011-13 biennium and \$110,028 in the 2013-15 biennium funded as discussed below. The total expenditure impact would be the difference between what the State Library and the Commission for the Blind are spending on the current service and the amount that is proposed to be spent on the expanded service as shown on the table above. Should the entire amount be funded by the PUC, the State Library has stated that they will re-direct the funds they are currently using for the audio newspaper service to enhancements for the Talking Book and Braille Services.

The proposed new funding of the program is from the Residential Service Protection Fund (RSPF) administered by the PUC. The monies in this fund are from a monthly surcharge assessed against retail telephone subscribers, currently \$0.12 per subscriber line. The PUC states that the proposed funding mechanism may require a \$0.01 per month increase in the RSPS assessment to maintain adequate cash flow to supports existing demands on the assessment, in addition to the audio newspaper service.

Current law limits the assessment to no more than \$0.35 per month. The \$0.01 per month increase in the surcharge would raise an estimated additional \$998,788 each biennium for the RSPF.

The PUC would make an annual revenue transfer of Other Funds received from the monthly surcharge to the Commission for the Blind. The Commission for the Blind would use the funds to provide the statewide audio newspaper service. The expenditures for the proposed legislation are not included as a policy option package for the Commission for the Blind and will require additional Other Funds limitation should the legislation be adopted.