

FISCAL IMPACT OF PROPOSED LEGISLATION

Measure: HB 3273

Seventy-Seventh Oregon Legislative Assembly – 2013 Regular Session
Legislative Fiscal Office

*Only Impacts on Original or Engrossed
Versions are Considered Official*

Prepared by: Kim To
Reviewed by: John Borden, Michelle Deister, Linda Ames
Date: 4/10/2013

Measure Description:

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

Government Unit(s) Affected:

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

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:

House Bill 3273 requires the Public Utility Commission (PUC) to provide a statewide audio newspaper service to be administered by the State Library with assistance from the Commission for the Blind. The bill specifies that members of the Telecommunication Devices Access Program Advisory Committee must be appointed by the PUC, and changes the number of consumer members on the Committee from nine to ten, to include one member who is blind. In addition, the bill stipulates that in order to be eligible to receive the statewide audio newspaper service, individuals must be certified by the State Library.

Currently, the State Library, in conjunction with the Commission for the Blind, is operating an audio newspaper service. The service provides blind and print-disabled access to newspapers, magazines and television listings using a touch-tone telephone or by digital download. Funding for the service has been from donations, and the estimated annual program cost is approximately \$32,000 Other Funds. This cost is split equally between the Commission for the Blind and the State Library. The State Library estimates this cost will increase approximately five percent a year.

House Bill 3273 proposes to replace the existing funding source from donations to 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. Currently, these funds are used to support programs to ensure telecommunications accessibility to vulnerable Oregonians, including the following programs:

- Oregon Telephone Assistance Program to help low-income Oregonians with monthly phone bills;
- Oregon Telephone Relay (711) System to provide full telephone accessibility to people who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf-blind, and speech-disabled; and
- Telecommunications Devices Access Program to loan adaptive telephone equipment to eligible Oregonians with hearing, vision, speech, mobility or cognitive impairments.

The addition of the statewide audio newspaper service program to this fund as required by this bill may impact future surcharge calculations.

If this legislation should be adopted, the PUC would make an annual revenue transfer of \$65,964 Other Funds received from the monthly surcharge to the Commission for the Blind for the 2013-15 and 2015-17 biennia. The Commission for the Blind would leverage these funds with federal funds to provide the statewide audio newspaper service. The State Library and the Commission for the Blind has stated that with passage of this bill, the agencies will re-direct the donated funds they are using for the audio newspaper service to enhancements for the Talking Book and Braille Services.