

Lisa Ferris
Miles Access Skills Training, LLC
April 18, 2019

RE: Testimony in Favor of HB 3205

Dear Senators:

My name is Lisa Ferris and I am Deafblind. My partner, Niklas Petersson, and I operate an adaptive tech training business in Portland called Miles Access Skills Training. We work with employers and people with disabilities to use adaptive technology to open up job opportunities and improve their lives.

I would like to share with you how I make phone calls as a Deafblind individual, and then explain why Communication Facilitators for the Deafblind are important, even when methods such as I use are available.

I make phone calls with adaptive technology. I use Sprint Relay service, an iPhone, and a braille display. My braille display has mechanical pins that I can feel to read braille characters. It is paired via Bluetooth to my iPhone. My iPhone uses an accessibility feature called VoiceOver that reads aloud what is on my phone screen. Since I can't hear it, I read what it says on my braille display. When I make a call, I open up the Sprint IP relay app and type in a phone number. This connects my call to a relay operator who translates what I am typing to the other person on the line. The operator also translates back to me via my braille display what the speaker on the line has said. It is a bit slow, but works well.

Using this method takes a variety of skills:

1. A basic command of written language.
2. A working knowledge of Braille
3. A familiarity of basic functions of technology, for example, how to pair the braille display to the device, set up cellular service or WIFI, understand how menus and submenus, links, lists, etc., work.
4. Knowledge of how the adaptive tech works, such as how to navigate using VoiceOver with Braille Display, which includes memorization a list of commands and chord keystrokes used to control the devices.
5. Knowledge of how to use TTY relay apps and services such as Sprint Relay.

Not everyone is going to be able to do this. Additional disabilities, language/reading literacy issues, age, financial limitations, access to equipment, or personal preference may not make this method doable or preferable to some Deafblind individuals.

For others who might benefit from this method, a lack of training opportunities is a real barrier. There is very little funding available for Deafblind individuals to learn how to use adaptive technology, and there is a shortage of trainers knowledgeable enough in this method and experienced enough to work with the Deafblind.

When there is funding for adaptive technology, there are many Deafblind individuals who could benefit from this method. However, the Communication Facilitator is still a necessary component to bridge individuals from being unable to access telecommunications at all to perhaps being able to take advantage of adaptive technology.

In our work, we have trained many individuals who are Deafblind to use this type of adaptive technology. We have been able to do this by using Communication Facilitators. Often, we train remotely via the phone when our clients live far away or have significant challenges coming to us. In this case, the communication flow goes like this:

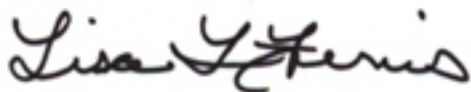
Our trainer → Text or Video Relay Service → Local, In-Person Communication Facilitator → Deafblind Learner

Without the link of the Communication Facilitator, many Deafblind clients would be unable to access adaptive technology training. This training can be a breakthrough to access the written word, telecommunications, the Internet and all the services it has to offer, and even live communications with the public. Access technology can help reduce caregiver costs, keep a person living in their own home, enable employment, improve quality of life and connect people to their communities. The Communications Facilitator is often a vital link to Deafblind individuals accessing this technology.

When learning new skills, when technology breaks down, or when a person is unable due to other factors to use technology, it is imperative that Deafblind people have options. Making doctors appointments, doing business, talking to teachers, family members and friends, and many other essential tasks still often depends on access to telecommunications.

Please support HB 3205 to expand telecommunications services for the Deafblind by providing communications facilitators.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa Ferris". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lisa Ferris