



Appropriation to the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) for the Purchase of Refreshable Braille Devices

An appropriation to the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped will save money and lead to the proliferation of critically needed Braille material for blind Americans.

There are 119,487 libraries of all types operating in the United States today;¹ however, blind Americans rely on NLS to distribute Braille books across the nation. Currently these are hardcopy offerings, but new, low-cost displays (known as refreshable Braille displays) can produce electronic Braille, saving money, saving paper, and providing a small device where formerly multiple and large volumes were required for just one book. Until all Blind Americans have access to high-quality, reliable, refreshable Braille, blind people will continue to encounter artificial barriers in literacy, education, and employment.

Innovative advances in refreshable Braille technology could save NLS \$10 million per year.

A recent GAO report indicated that the distribution of refreshable Braille devices will result in an annual cost savings of \$10 million.² Since 1931, hardcopy Braille has been embossed and distributed to patrons through a network of regional and subregional libraries. It is impossible to predict the titles that would be requested at any particular regional library. As a result, there could be five copies of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (13 volumes of Braille)³ in Boise, Idaho and none in Richmond, Virginia where several patrons are currently waiting. Moreover, in 2015 the cost of embossing, housing, and shipping hardcopy Braille volumes was \$17 million per year.⁴

Technological innovations now make it possible for Braille to be produced in electronic files. These can be accessed on refreshable Braille displays and distributed electronically at a cost of \$7 million.⁵ Like other types of electronic files (such as printed materials in .docx format), the same Braille book can be read by potentially thousands of patrons at the same time with refreshable Braille devices. Today, the mass production and distribution of Braille content is not only technologically possible; but the method is cost effective, and vast quantities of Braille material can now be stored, transported, and instantly accessed on refreshable Braille displays.

Braille literacy is essential to employment for the blind. Among blind people who are employed, 85 percent are Braille readers.⁶ In 1931 the Pratt-Smoot Act centralized the collection and housing of the very small number of individually produced Braille books then existing in the United States.⁷ But even though library services have been made available to blind people on a national scale, the broad distribution of hard-copy Braille books is not feasible. Eighty-six years later, the unemployment rate among the blind in 2014 continued to hover around 60 percent.⁸ Recognizing this fact, in acknowledgement of the importance of Braille literacy, the 114th Congress amended the Pratt-Smoot Act to authorize NLS to provide its patrons with refreshable Braille displays.

A one-time appropriation of five million dollars to the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped would:

Enable NLS to purchase, through the bidding process, ten thousand refreshable Braille displays to be loaned to NLS patrons

Make Braille materials more widely available to blind Americans than ever before, thereby improving Braille literacy among blind Americans and leading to increased employability

**SUPPORT BRAILLE LITERACY.
Cosponsor the NLS Appropriation for Refreshable Braille Displays.**

For more information, contact:

Parnell Diggs, Director of Government Affairs, National Federation of the Blind
Phone: (410) 659-9314, extension 2222, Email: pdiggs@nfb.org

For more information visit www.nfb.org

¹ "Number of Libraries in the United States." Professional Tools. 2015. Accessed December 12, 2016. <http://www.ala.org/tools/libfactsheets/alalibraryfactsheet01>.

² United States Government Accountability Office. "Library Services for Those with Disabilities" Report to Congressional Committees. April 2016.

³ United States Government Accountability Office. "Library Services for Those with Disabilities" Report to Congressional Committees. April 2016.

⁴ United States Government Accountability Office. "Library Services for Those with Disabilities" Report to Congressional Committees. April 2016.

⁵ United States Government Accountability Office. "Library Services for Those with Disabilities" Report to Congressional Committees. April 2016.

⁶ Bell, E. C., & Mino, N. M. (2015). "Employment Outcomes for Blind and Visually Impaired Adults." Journal of Blindness Innovation and Research, 5(2). Retrieved from <https://nfb.org/images/nfb/publications/jbir/jbir15/jbir050202.html>. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5241/5-85>.

⁷ Pratt-Smoot Act, Pub. L. No. 71-787, ch. 400, 46 Stat. 1487 (1931) (codified as amended at 2 U.S.C. §§ 135a, 135a-1)

⁸ American Community Survey. www.disabilitystatistics.org.