# **Laws the Blind Depend On**

## **The Rehabilitation Act of 1973**

Section 501 prohibits the federal government from discriminating against people with disabilities in employment and requires reasonable accommodations for federal employees.

Section 503 prohibits federal contractors from discriminating against individuals with disabilities in employment, including requiring reasonable accommodations.

Section 504 prohibits the federal government and federal grantees from discriminating on the basis of disability in providing programs and services.

Section 508 requires federal technology, including websites, software, and technology provided by vendors, to be accessible to the blind.

## **The Americans with Disabilities Act**

Title I of the ADA prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities by private and public employers.

Title II of the ADA prohibits state and local governments from discriminating on the basis of disability in their programs and services, including requiring reasonable modifications and requiring their websites and applications to be accessible to the blind. Title II ensures that voting, transportation, justice systems and government services are accessible to the blind.

Title III of the ADA prohibits disability discrimination by private public accommodations in their goods, services and information, including reasonable modifications and accessible websites and applications.

## **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act**

The IDEA requires public schools to accommodate students with disabilities and to provide specialized education services when students need them. Braille literacy is essential to blind students and, therefore, they need specialized Braille instruction and Braille equipment. They also need access technology, such as screen reading software, and audio materials, large print materials, and tactile graphics, all of which are considered special education. The IDEA provides for important due process protections that allow parents of students with disabilities to resolve disputes with their schools without resorting to the courts.

# **Federal Funding the Blind Depend On**

## **Special Education**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act provides federal funding to states to provide required “special education” services for public school students with disabilities. While states provide most special education funding, the federal government provides about $15 billion. This serves some 7.5 million students. Special education services for the blind include Braille instruction, access technologies, and specialized teachers of the blind.

## **Vocational Rehabilitation**

The federal government provides grants to states to provide “vocational rehabilitation” (VR) programs to help people with disabilities become employed. The federal government provides about 79 percent of the funding, with states providing the rest. VR programs serve over 800,000 individuals each year. Without VR services, many blind people would be unable to gain employment, leaving them reliant on public benefits to survive.

## **Free Matter for the Blind**

The US Postal Service provides free postage for special material used by blind individuals, such as Braille or audio material. Organizations who serve the blind rely on this service to keep costs down, which, due to the size of the materials, would be cost-prohibitive.

## **National Library Service for the Blind and Institute of Museum and Library Services**

NLS provides free Braille and recorded materials to the blind. IMLS is a federal agency that helps libraries and museums. An important part of IMLS funding supports libraries to be accessible to the blind. Without access to library services, blind people would lose access to information, education, and entertainment others take for granted.

## **Older Blind Programs**

Federally funded state-run older blind programs serve blind individuals over age 54 to help them live independently. The programs teach independent living skills so blind people can remain in their homes and communities and avoid placement in expensive nursing homes.

## **Protection & Advocacy**

Each state has a federally funded “protection and advocacy” program that represents people with disabilities facing abuse, civil rights violations, denials of benefits, and lack of access to health care, education, employment, housing, transportation, and voting.

## **Medicaid**

Medicaid is a federal grant program to states to cover health care for low-income and disabled individuals. The federal government provides about 70 percent of the funding with states making up the rest. Without Medicaid funding, many blind people would lose access to health care, including treatment for their vision disabilities.