**GEORGIA COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND TALKING POINTS**

The purpose for the establishment of a Commission for the Blind and the Visually Impaired is to ensure that people who are blind/visually impaired from cradle to grave have access to quality services so they may attain independent living skills, successful career Opportunities, promotion of  the upward mobility of the consumer as a viable member of the community and to do whatever deems necessary to achieve the most positive outcome for the consumer.

A Bill to transfer ALL BLIND SERVICES from the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency to an independent Commission for the Blind and the Visually Impaired.

A.  What is a Commission for the Blind?  
A Commission for the Blind is an independent entity charged with providing direct services to the consumers of Georgia who are blind and visually impaired, and whose Board majority  is comprised of blind and visually impaired individuals.

B.  Why does Georgia need a separate Commission for the Blind?

1. Dr. Kenneth Jernigan, Recipient of a Congressional Gold Medal for his work in the field of Blindness, established the first Commission for the Blind in Iowa in 1960.  It soon became the best agency serving the blind in the United States.

2. Nebraska adopted a Commission approach for rehabilitation of the blind in 2004. It was the 28th state to change to a Commission.  Similar legislation is currently pending in other states.

3. When blind people do not receive proper and adequate training in the skills of Blindness and become successfully employed, the lifetime cost to taxpayers is 916,000 dollars.

4. The average salary of blind people in Georgia who receive job placement services through the Department of Labor Division of Rehabilitation Services, last year was 14,000 dollars.

5. The job market is not as open to the blind of Georgia as in states serviced by Commissions for the Blind.  In many states the blind work as lawyers, scientists, teachers, information retrieval specialists and many other occupations.  These employment opportunities are rare in Georgia.

6. Proficiency in the use of Braille increases employment opportunities for the blind. U.S. Department of Labor statistics show that Ninety one percent of successfully employed blind people are Braille readers.  Currently there is no program in Georgia with a strong enough emphasis on the instruction of Braille.

7. The ability to travel independently builds confidence and is a necessity for employment.  There is no strong program to teach independent travel in Georgia, and a lack of Orientation and Mobility instructors to carry out such instruction.

8. The blind can perform many jobs using print to speech, print to Braille, or print enlargement screen access software.  At this time, no training program offered in Georgia teaches blind people adequate computer technology skills to facilitate gainful employment.

9. Senior citizens who become blind need training to regain their independence.  Training enables them to stay in their homes and maintain their status as a contributing member of society.  Because of the lack of adequate training, Georgia forces older adults to enter nursing homes at an average medicaid cost of 83,655 dollars per person per year.  
10. When blind people are properly trained and gainfully employed, they pay back in taxes nine times the cost of their training.  
C.  Needed Action  
The Georgia Legislature should pass a law to establish a Commission for the Blind and the Visually Impaired for the state of Georgia.

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