
2020 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FROM THE BLIND OF VIRGINIA

Priority #1: Enable blind people to get back to work faster.

Action: Support the Governor's budget proposal for increased funds for DBVI.

Issue: The Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) provides vocational rehabilitation training, leading to employment of Virginians who are blind, deaf/blind, and vision impaired. DBVI provides training in the alternative techniques used by blind people to work and live independently. Funding for DBVI has not increased for 20 years and the waiting list for vocational rehabilitation services has grown to 250 adults and 400 underserved students. Individuals on the wait list typically wait for nearly 12 months before receiving services. Blind Virginians want to work and live independently.

Solution: Support the Governor's budget to increase DBVI funding. The Governor's budget proposal is a significant step towards ensuring the availability of sufficient funds needed to serve all blind Virginians who require vocational rehabilitation services. The Governor's budget proposal would eliminate the waiting list of 250 people, expand available workforce services, and assure a source of matching funds for the federal vocational rehabilitation grant. The Governor's budget proposal also expands funding for older blind rehab teaching staff, allowing older blind Virginians to live independently in their homes without having to depend on institutional settings. Without this funding, many Virginians will be denied services which lead them to self-sufficiency and the opportunity to lead productive lives.

Priority #2: Implement a hiring priority for Virginians with disabilities in state government.

Action: Co-patron HB 584 (Patron Delegate Guzman, 31st District) and SB162 (Patron Senator Spruill, 5th District) which adds a priority for hiring people with disabilities as state employees.

Issue: One in ten Virginians have a disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. According to the 2017 Disability Status Report by Cornell University, only about half as many Virginians with disabilities were employed in 2016, as compared to Virginians without any disabilities. Furthermore, Virginians with Disabilities are economically disadvantaged compared to their non-disabled peers even when employed. The 2017 Pew Research Center Disability Statistics annual report found that the median earnings for the Virginians with disabilities who are employed is only about two thirds of the median earnings for Virginians without disabilities.

Solution: Provide hiring preference to persons with disabilities for jobs with the Commonwealth of Virginia. HB584/SB162 will eliminate barriers to state employment for people with disabilities by creating a hiring preference similar to the existing veteran preference if a person with a disability meets all the knowledge, skill, and ability requirements for the available position. The preference requires that a person with a disability be hired over a person without a disability when the two individuals are substantially equal in qualifications for an eligible position. The fiscal impact for

changing the hiring process is \$0 and the cost of accommodations would be on the hiring agency. Accommodations are typically under \$500. Existing Virginia law requires the Commonwealth to promote and increase hiring of people with disabilities and agencies have been tracking their progress towards a 5% target since 2017.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND

The National Federation of the Blind is America's largest and most active organization of the blind. With more than 50,000 members, we are not an "agency" claiming to speak for the blind; we are blind people speaking for ourselves. In Virginia, we are organized into 14 local chapters throughout the Commonwealth, and into various special interest divisions.