

January 20, 2023

Public Comment for House Bill 2 – Health & Human Services

Childcare Funding

- “We need to help families with well paid, safe and professional care...as our children ARE our Future.”

-Dawn Gandalf

- “Please support our working families with this funding that addresses the crisis of paying for childcare in our state. We need to cap the cost of childcare for MT families and revise the reimbursement structure to bring more stability to childcare providers – much like HB 238. Thank you for your time and consideration.”

-Mindy Ferrell

- “We need to have available and affordable childcare if we want parents in the workforce. Please support funding for childcare.”

-Charlene Iannucci

Disability Services

- “Support the Governor’s proposed budget that adds additional FTE positions to Disability Employment & Transitions Division.”

-Tom Osborn

- “I am in support of HB2.

On behalf of the National Federation of the Blind of Montana, I would like to thank Chanda Hermanson-Dudley for her commitment to fund NFB-NEWSLINE®. NFB-NEWSLINE® is a service which is vitally important to the blind and print disabled citizens of Montana. NFB-NEWSLINE® provides the content of newspapers and other publications in an accessible format. Stable funding is vital for NFB-NEWSLINE®.

In the past, NFB-NEWSLINE® has received funding from a variety of sources:

-Montana Association for the Blind (MAB) Paid for NFB-NEWSLINE® with its own money.

-State Library. Paid for NFB-NEWSLINE® for one biennium with state dollars authorized by a legislative session.

-Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services paid for NFB-NEWSLINE® via services to Groups, using VR funding.

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-Telecommunications Access by People with Disabilities Committee/Montana Telecommunications Access Program. Funded NFB-NEWSLINE® for several years until the Committee reversed its support in 2018. VRBS declined to pick up the costs, and NFB-NEWSLINE® went away for a while.

-National Federation of the Blind. Funded NFB-NEWSLINE® during most of the pandemic. Our national organization did not want blind Montanans to go without access to mainstream Montana newspapers and other information sources.

-State Library. Funded Newsline from July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2023.

We are seeking to secure funding for Newsline after July 1, 2023.

Thank you for your consideration.”

-Robert S. Jaquiss

- “I would like to thank Division Administrator Chanda Hermanson for committing to fund NFB-NEWSLINE. NFB-Newsline is a free audio and braille service that provides access to information sources such as newspapers and magazines for individuals who cannot access print due to a disability! Funding for NFB-NEWSLINE has been unstable for many years and we appreciate VR’s commitment to fund this great service that enhances the lives of blind/low vision individuals.

I would also like to ask the legislator to add substantially more state dollars to the Independent Living Services for Older Individuals who are Blind Program. This will allow BLVS to fill vacancies with qualified staff, and to promptly deliver services to older blind Montanans.

As a peer mentor and the NFB-NEWSLINE Montana coordinator, I have encountered many older blind individuals who are unable to receive blindness training skills because there is not enough time or qualified staff to serve them. Because of staff shortages, many older blind Montanans are presently waiting six months or longer to receive assistance. Some of these services are as fundamental and as life changing as a magnification system, which would restore at least some of their independence. The demand for such life-enhancing services for the older blind in Montana far outpaces the supply. This situation leaves far too many Montanans unnecessarily isolated and without a support system, this is especially true in rural areas. Isolation and dependence adversely affect their physical and mental wellbeing and leaves them at risk of being placed in expensive nursing homes or other care facilities.

Thank you for your time and consideration,”

-Samantha Chase