

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED  
AN ACT

1 To amend Part 1A of Article 2 of Chapter 5 of Title 46 of the Official Code of Georgia  
2 Annotated, relating to the telephone system for the physically impaired, so as to provide for  
3 the establishment of a state-wide telecommunication system capable of providing audible  
4 universal information access services to blind and print disabled citizens; to authorize the  
5 Public Service Commission to contract for the administration and operation of such system;  
6 to provide for the use of a portion of the monthly maintenance surcharge to be used to fund  
7 such system; to provide for immunity for the commission and for the providers of such  
8 system; to establish criteria for the selection of a service provider; to set a date for the  
9 beginning operation of such system; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws;  
10 and for other purposes.

11 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

**SECTION 1.**

12 Part 1A of Article 2 of Chapter 5 of Title 46 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated,  
13 relating to the telephone system for the physically impaired, is amended by striking Code  
14 Section 46-5-30, relating to establishment, administration, and operation of state-wide dual  
15 party relay service, and inserting in its place the following:  
16

17 "46-5-30.

18 (a) The General Assembly finds and declares that it is in the public interest to provide  
19 basic telecommunication services to all citizens of this state who, because of physical  
20 impairments, particularly hearing and speech impairments, cannot otherwise communicate  
21 over the telephone. It is further in the public interest to take advantage of innovative  
22 technological uses of basic telecommunications services to allow for universal access to  
23 information by blind and otherwise print disabled citizens of this state.

24 (b) The commission shall establish, implement, administer, and promote a state-wide  
25 single provider dual party relay service operating seven days per week, 24 hours per day,  
26 and contract for the administration and operation of such relay service. The commission

1 shall also establish, implement, administer, and promote a state-wide audible universal  
 2 information access service operating seven days per week and 24 hours per day and shall  
 3 contract for the administration and operation of such information access service. The  
 4 commission shall ~~also~~ further establish, implement, administer, and promote a  
 5 telecommunications equipment distribution program and contract for the administration  
 6 and operation of such program.

7 (c) The commission shall require all local exchange telephone companies in this state,  
 8 except those operated by telephone membership corporations, to impose a monthly  
 9 maintenance surcharge on all residential and business local exchange access facilities. For  
 10 the purpose of this subsection, 'exchange access facility' means the access from a particular  
 11 telephone subscriber's premise to the telephone system of a local exchange telephone  
 12 company. 'Exchange access facility' includes local exchange company provided access  
 13 lines, private branch exchange trunks, and centrex network access registers, all as defined  
 14 by tariffs of telephone companies as approved by the commission. The amount of the  
 15 surcharge shall be determined by the commission based upon the amount of funding  
 16 necessary to accomplish the purposes of this Code section and provide the services on an  
 17 ongoing basis; however, in no case shall the amount exceed 20¢ per month. A maximum  
 18 of \$0.05 of this monthly surcharge per access line shall be utilized for a  
 19 telecommunications equipment distribution program and a maximum of \$0.01 of this  
 20 monthly surcharge per access line shall be utilized to fund an audible universal information  
 21 access service. If the projected cost of the operation of the relay service exceeds a monthly  
 22 surcharge of \$0.15 at any time, funding for the telecommunications equipment distribution  
 23 program and the audible universal information access service will be reduced by the  
 24 amount required to fully fund the relay service, under the existing cap of \$0.20 for the  
 25 period of time necessary. No additional fees other than the surcharge authorized by this  
 26 subsection shall be imposed on any user of such relay or information access service. The  
 27 local exchange companies shall collect the surcharge from their customers and transfer the  
 28 moneys collected to a special fund to be held separate from all other funds. The fund shall  
 29 be used solely for the administration and operation of the relay service, the information  
 30 access service, and the telecommunications equipment distribution program and shall not  
 31 be imposed, collected, or expended for any other purpose.

32 (d) The dual party relay system shall protect the privacy of persons to whom relay services  
 33 are provided and shall require all operators to maintain the confidentiality of all telephone  
 34 messages. The confidentiality and privacy of persons to whom relay services are provided  
 35 will be protected by means of the following:

1 (1) The relay center shall not maintain any form of permanent copies of messages  
2 relayed by their operators or allow the content of telephone messages to be  
3 communicated to, or accessible to, nonstaff members;

4 (2) Persons using the relay services shall not be required to provide any personal  
5 identifying information until the party they are calling is on the line, and shall only be  
6 required to identify themselves to the extent necessary to fulfill the purpose of their call;

7 (3) Relay operators shall not leave messages with third parties unless instructed to do so  
8 by the person making the call;

9 (4) Relay operators shall not intentionally alter a relayed conversation; and

10 (5) Relay operators shall not refuse calls or limit the length of calls.

11 (e) Neither the commission nor the ~~provider~~ providers of the dual party relay system  
12 service or the audible universal information access service nor, except in cases of willful  
13 misconduct, gross negligence, or bad faith, the employees of the providers of the dual party  
14 relay system service or the audible universal information access service shall be liable for  
15 any claims, actions, damages, or causes of action arising out of or resulting from the  
16 establishment, participation in, or operation of the dual party relay system service or the  
17 audible universal information access service.

18 (f) The commission shall select the telecommunications carrier which will provide the  
19 relay system service and award the contract for this service to the offerer whose proposal  
20 is the most advantageous to the state, considering price, the interests of the hearing  
21 impaired and speech impaired community in having access to a high quality and  
22 technologically advanced telecommunication system, and all other factors listed in the  
23 commission's request for proposals.

24 (f.1) The commission shall select the service provider which will provide and manage the  
25 audible universal information access service and award the contract for this service to the  
26 offerer whose proposal is the most advantageous to the state, considering price, the  
27 interests of the blind and print disabled community in having access to a high quality and  
28 technologically advanced interactive audible universal information access system,  
29 maintaining such system, and receiving training on the use of such service, outreach  
30 efforts, and all other factors listed in the commission's request for proposals.

31 (g) The commission shall select a distribution agency to manage the telecommunications  
32 equipment distribution program and award the contract for this service to the offerer whose  
33 proposal is the most advantageous to the state, considering price, the interests of the  
34 hearing impaired and speech impaired community in obtaining appropriate and effective  
35 telecommunications equipment, the training of recipients on the use of telecommunication  
36 devices, outreach efforts, and all other factors listed in the commission's request for  
37 proposals.

1 (h) The commission shall establish guidelines for eligibility for participation in the  
2 distribution program, taking into consideration a person's certified medical need and  
3 prohibiting distribution of telecommunications equipment to any person whose income  
4 exceeds 200 percent of the federal poverty level. The commission shall utilize appropriate  
5 external expertise, as necessary, to establish these guidelines, including contracting with  
6 public agencies or private entities. Funding for any such contracts will be covered by the  
7 \$0.05 portion of the monthly surcharge utilized for the telecommunications equipment  
8 distribution program.

9 (i) The commission shall establish a telecommunications equipment distribution program  
10 advisory committee to provide input on program operation and the types of equipment to  
11 be, and being, distributed by the program. The commission shall select the equipment to  
12 be distributed by the program and shall incorporate this selection into the commission's  
13 request for proposals for a distribution agency.

14 (j) The commission shall provide that the dual party telephone relay telephone system shall  
15 be operational no later than July 1, 1991, ~~and~~ that the telecommunications equipment  
16 distribution program shall be operational no later than March 31, 2003, and the audible  
17 universal information access service shall be operational no later than July 1, 2005."

## 18 SECTION 2.

19 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.