

Senate Bill 326

By: Senators Davenport of the 17th, Wicks of the 34th, Jackson of the 41st, Jones II of the 22nd, Anderson of the 43rd and others

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

1 To amend Title 30 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to handicapped
2 persons, so as to provide for a program for support service providers to assist blind and
3 deaf-blind individuals in navigating employment and higher education opportunities; to
4 provide for a short title; to provide for a legislative purpose; to provide for definitions; to
5 establish an advisory committee; to provide for membership, duties, and meetings; to provide
6 for program administration by the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency; to provide for
7 criteria, standards, and eligibility; to provide for prioritization; to provide for annual
8 reporting; to provide for publication of information; to provide for related matters; to provide
9 for an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

10 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

11 **SECTION 1.**

12 Title 30 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to handicapped persons, is
13 amended by adding a new chapter to read as follows:

14

"CHAPTER 1115 30-11-1.

16 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the 'Georgia Support Service Provider
17 Act of 2025.'

18 30-11-2.19 The purpose of this chapter is to:

20 (1) Establish a program to provide, arrange, and fund support service providers to assist
21 blind and deaf-blind individuals in navigating employment and higher education
22 opportunities;

23 (2) Reduce barriers to workforce participation and postsecondary education for blind and
24 deaf-blind individuals; and

25 (3) Enhance economic independence and social inclusion of blind and deaf-blind
26 individuals by offering personal and real-time employment assistance and higher
27 education assistance.

28 30-11-3.29 As used in this chapter, the term:

30 (1) 'Advisory committee' means the Support Service Provider Program Advisory
31 Committee created under Code Section 30-11-4.

32 (2) 'Agency' means the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency.

33 (3) 'Blind' means having vision that is 20/200 or less in the best corrected eye or having
34 vision that subtends an angle of not greater than 20 degrees in the best corrected eye.

35 (4) 'Deaf-blind' means having a combined loss of vision and hearing which prevents the
36 individual's vision or hearing from being used as a primary source for accessing
37 information.

38 (5) 'Employment assistance' means assisting a blind or deaf-blind individual with:

39 (A) Job application support, including assisting with job searches, application
40 completion, resume writing, and interview preparation;

41 (B) Workplace orientation, including helping a blind or deaf-blind employee navigate
42 new workplaces, understand spatial layouts, and access assistive technology; and

43 (C) Transportation coordination, including facilitating accessible transportation to and
44 from job interviews and employment sites.

45 (6) 'Higher education assistance' means assisting a blind or deaf-blind individual with:

46 (A) College enrollment support, including assisting with admissions, financial aid
47 applications, and orientation programs;

48 (B) Classroom and campus navigation, including providing guidance to locate
49 classrooms, libraries, and student resources; and

50 (C) Academic support, including helping blind and deaf-blind students access adaptive
51 technology, note-taking services, and tutoring accommodations.

52 (7) 'Program' means the Support Service Provider Program created under this chapter.

53 (8) 'Support service provider' means an individual who is specially trained to provide
54 employment assistance and higher education assistance to blind and deaf-blind
55 individuals.

56 30-11-4.

57 (a) There is created a Support Service Provider Program Advisory Committee to provide
58 recommendations and guidance to the agency in establishing, implementing, and
59 administering the program established pursuant to this chapter.

60 (b) The advisory committee shall consist of nine members appointed by the Governor who
61 shall be blind or deaf-blind individuals, disability advocates, business leaders or employers,
62 representatives of higher education institutions, and support service providers. The
63 Governor shall designate one member as chairperson.

64 (c) The term of each member of the advisory committee shall be for two years, provided
65 that of the members first appointed, five shall be appointed for terms of one year and four
66 for terms of two years. Whenever any vacancy in membership of the advisory committee
67 occurs, the Governor shall appoint a qualified person to fill the unexpired term. Each
68 member shall serve until a successor is appointed and qualified. No member shall serve
69 more than two consecutive terms.

70 (d) The advisory committee shall meet at the call of the chairperson and shall meet at least
71 quarterly. No later than January 1, 2026, the advisory committee shall provide initial
72 recommendations to the agency.

73 (e) Members of the advisory committee shall serve as such without compensation but shall
74 receive the same expense allowance as that received by members of the General Assembly
75 and the same mileage allowance for the use of a personal car or a travel allowance of actual
76 transportation cost if traveling by public carrier as that received by all other state officials
77 and employees.

78 (f) The agency shall provide reasonable administrative support to the advisory committee.

79 30-11-5.

80 (a) The agency is authorized to establish and administer the Support Service Provider
81 Program to provide, arrange, or fund support service providers to provide employment
82 assistance and higher education assistance to blind and deaf-blind individuals residing in
83 this state.

84 (b) The agency, in consultation with the advisory committee, shall establish standards and
85 criteria for the program, support services, support service providers, and applicants to
86 receive support services.

87 (c) No later than January 1, 2027, the program shall be fully operational.

88 (d) The agency shall contract with qualified nonprofit organizations and independent
89 support service providers to deliver employment assistance and higher education assistance
90 to blind and deaf-blind individuals through the program.

91 (e) Any resident of this state who is blind or deaf-blind and seeking employment or
92 postsecondary education shall be eligible for support services; provided, however, that
93 priority shall be given to individuals from low-income backgrounds and residing in
94 underserved rural areas.

95 30-11-6.

96 (a) The agency shall be authorized to accept donations, contributions, and gifts and to
97 receive, hold, and use grants, devises, and bequests of real, personal, and mixed property
98 on behalf of the state to enable the agency to carry out the functions and purposes of this
99 chapter.

100 (b) The agency shall be authorized to pursue federal funding opportunities and
101 collaborations with private entities, nonprofit organizations, and philanthropic
102 organizations to fund the program established pursuant to this chapter.

103 30-11-7.

104 Beginning December 1, 2027, the agency shall prepare and submit to the Governor, the
105 President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives an annual report
106 evaluating the effectiveness of the program established pursuant to this chapter. Such
107 report shall include the number of individuals served, employment and education
108 outcomes, budget expenditures and financial accountability, and recommendations for
109 program expansion or improvement. The agency shall publish such reports on its website
110 in a prominent location."

111 **SECTION 2.**

112 This Act shall become effective upon its approval by the Governor or upon its becoming law
113 without such approval.

114 **SECTION 3.**

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