

STATE OF KANSAS
SENATE CHAMBER

STATE CAPITOL
300 S.W. TENTH AVENUE
TOPEKA, KS 66612
(785) 296-7391
mary.ware@senate.ks.gov



DISTRICT ADDRESS
1444 N. PERRY AVE.
WICHITA, KS 67203
mary@wareforkansas.com

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MARY WARE
25TH DISTRICT

Senate Committee on Utilities

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB-284

Senator Mary Ware

Proponent

Chairman Mike Fagg, Vice Chair Mike Peterson, Ranking Minority Member Marci Francisco and members of the Senate Utilities Committee.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on SB 284. SB 284 provides for a critical service for our Kansas neighbors who are blind, visually impaired, deaf blind or print impaired. These four groups include those who were born with a visual disability, those who developed it during life through disease or injury, the many elderly who have diminished vision as well as children who struggle with a visual disability.

Imagine for just a moment, life without a connection to all the world has to offer. Consider that feeling of being separated, of being left out.

To get a clearer picture of what this resource provides, think about all the periodicals available at your public library including newspapers and magazines as well as emergency notifications. The offering for the service includes periodicals aimed at all ages and backgrounds. Besides straight news, the list has over 500 periodical options including something for just about everyone from children to seniors, homemakers to fishermen, those politically on the left or on the right, investments as well as hobbies, from science to puzzles and from agriculture to the arts.

This information access has been offered to those who qualify for some time. However, funding for this assistance has proved to be a constant struggle. The blind community has used a patchwork of funding methods over the years from sponsorships to grants. So, the primary reason for this bill is to secure consistent funding for this much needed service and to expand its use.

While the blind and deaf blind communities are generally aware of this life enhancing information access, the visually impaired and print disabled are often not aware that they, too, could have a connection to the world through this service. Beyond that, there is a need within

our visually impaired and print disabled communities, in particular, to understand that it exists, who can qualify and what the process is to get this important connection to the news of the day. In fact, it has been estimated that only a tenth of those who could benefit from this service are receiving it. That is where there Kansas State Library FTE comes in. Their responsibilities would include locating those eligible and educating them about all facets of the service along with manning the Help Desk and instructing and handling the parental controls for minors using the service in addition to locating and incorporating more local Kansas news sources.

Thank you and I hope you are as excited as I am about what SB 284 has to offer for so many Kansans that truly need it. Please, pass this bill out favorably.

Senator Mary Ware
District 25
Wichita, Kansas