

Issue Brief:
Washington Talking Book & Braille Library
(Supplemental Budget Request)



The Washington Talking Book and Braille Library (WTBBL) is the only public library in Washington State dedicated to providing library services to citizens who cannot read or have difficulty reading conventional printed material due to blindness or a learning or a physical disability. It serves over 13,000 patrons of all ages each year as one of 57 regional libraries of the Library of Congress, National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped.

In addition to recreational reading, WTBBL provides radio broadcasting reading local newspapers and other specialized programs, and local production of audio and Braille books focused on those of regional and local interest not otherwise available. It has special collections for parents of children with disabilities, coping with vision loss, career and consumer information in Braille, large print, and cassette. Reference staff assists patrons in finding accessible, authoritative information on a wide range of subjects.

Effective July 1, 2008 the Office of the Secretary of State (OSOS) will assume direct responsibility for the program, which has been operated under contract with Seattle Public Library since 1975. Under that contract, state funding has been relatively flat for over 10 years, while Seattle's costs have continued to increase annually, forcing a combination of reduction in services and staffing as well as a reliance on private fundraising to fill the budget gap. Compounding the current shortfall are projections for an ever increasing number of people with visual impairments, including blindness, due to the aging population.

Although the WTBBL will have reduced operating costs under the OSOS/Washington State Library, there is still a serious shortfall between current program operating costs and the amount of state funding already appropriated. The supplemental budget decision package included in the Governor's budget requests an additional \$340,916 in operational funding and authorization of the full 21.3 FTE staffing level to ensure that current services available to WTBBL patrons can be maintained when the state assumes responsibility for the program on July 1.

The Washington Library Association supports the continuation of current service levels for the Washington Talking Book and Braille Library and strongly encourages Legislative approval of the supplemental funding request that will make this possible.