

House Bill 201

By: Representatives Parsons of the 44th, Drenner of the 85th, Hugley of the 136th, and Houston of the 170th

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 telephone system for the physically impaired, so as to change certain
3 provisions relating to the establishment, administration, and operation of the state-wide dual
4 party relay service and audible universal information access service; to change certain
5 legislative findings and declarations; to eliminate the prohibition as to the distribution of
6 telecommunications equipment under telecommunications equipment distribution program
7 based on a certain income level; to provide that wireless devices and applications may be
8 distributed as part of the telecommunications equipment distribution program; to provide for
9 related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

10 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

11 style="text-align:center">**SECTION 1.**

12 Part 1A of Article 2 of Chapter 5 of Title 46 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated,
13 relating to telephone system for the physically impaired, is amended by revising Code
14 Section 46-5-30, relating to the establishment, administration, and operation of the state-wide
15 dual party relay service and audible universal information access service, as follows:

16 "46-5-30.

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

27 shall also establish, implement, administer, and promote a state-wide audible universal
28 information access service operating seven days per week and 24 hours per day and shall
29 contract for the administration and operation of such information access service. The
30 commission shall further establish, implement, administer, and promote a
31 telecommunications equipment distribution program and contract for the administration
32 and operation of such program.

33 (c) The commission shall require all local exchange telephone companies in this state,
34 except those operated by telephone membership corporations, to impose a monthly
35 maintenance surcharge on all residential and business local exchange access facilities. For
36 the purpose of this subsection, 'exchange access facility' means the access from a particular
37 telephone subscriber's premise to the telephone system of a local exchange telephone
38 company. 'Exchange access facility' includes local exchange company provided access
39 lines, private branch exchange trunks, and centrex network access registers, all as defined
40 by tariffs of telephone companies as approved by the commission. The amount of the
41 surcharge shall be determined by the commission based upon the amount of funding
42 necessary to accomplish the purposes of this Code section and provide the services on an
43 ongoing basis; however, in no case shall the amount exceed 20¢ per month. A maximum
44 of 5¢ of this monthly surcharge per access line shall be utilized for a telecommunications
45 equipment distribution program and a maximum of 1¢ of this monthly surcharge per access
46 line shall be utilized to fund an audible universal information access service. If the
47 projected cost of the operation of the relay service exceeds a monthly surcharge of 15¢ at
48 any time, funding for the telecommunications equipment distribution program and the
49 audible universal information access service will be reduced by the amount required to
50 fully fund the relay service, under the existing cap of 20¢ for the period of time necessary.
51 No additional fees other than the surcharge authorized by this subsection, if applicable,
52 shall be imposed on any user of such relay or information access service. The local
53 exchange companies shall collect the surcharge from their customers and transfer the
54 moneys collected to a special fund to be held separate from all other funds. The fund shall
55 be used solely for the administration and operation of the relay service, the information
56 access service, and the telecommunications equipment distribution program and for other
57 hearing technology and shall not be imposed, collected, or expended for any other purpose.
58 (d) The dual party relay system shall protect the privacy of persons to whom relay services
59 are provided and shall require all operators to maintain the confidentiality of all telephone
60 messages. The confidentiality and privacy of persons to whom relay services are provided
61 will be protected by means of the following:

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

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

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

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

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

72 (e) Neither the commission nor the providers of the dual party relay system service or the
 73 audible universal information access service nor, except in cases of willful misconduct,
 74 gross negligence, or bad faith, the employees of the providers of the dual party relay system
 75 service or the audible universal information access service shall be liable for any claims,
 76 actions, damages, or causes of action arising out of or resulting from the establishment,
 77 participation in, or operation of the dual party relay system service or the audible universal
 78 information access service.

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

85 ~~(f.1)~~(g) The commission shall select the service provider which will provide and manage
 86 the audible universal information access service and shall award the contract for this
 87 service to the offerer whose proposal is the most advantageous to the state, considering
 88 price, the interests of the blind and print disabled community in having access to a high
 89 quality and technologically advanced interactive audible universal information access
 90 system, the maintenance of such system, the training provided on the use of such service,
 91 outreach efforts, and all other factors listed in the commission's request for proposals.

92 ~~(g)~~(h) The commission shall select a distribution agency to manage the telecommunications
 93 equipment distribution program and award the contract for this service to the offerer whose
 94 proposal is the most advantageous to the state, considering price, the interests of the
 95 hearing impaired and speech impaired community in obtaining appropriate and effective
 96 telecommunications equipment, the training of recipients on the use of telecommunications
 97 devices, outreach efforts, and all other factors listed in the commission's request for
 98 proposals. The telecommunications equipment distributed as part of the

99 telecommunications equipment distribution program may include wireless devices and
 100 applications.

101 ~~(h)(i)~~ The commission shall establish guidelines for eligibility for participation in the
 102 telecommunications equipment distribution program, taking into consideration a person's
 103 certified medical need ~~and prohibiting distribution of telecommunications equipment to any~~
 104 ~~person whose income exceeds 200 percent of the federal poverty level.~~ The commission
 105 shall utilize appropriate external expertise, as necessary, to establish these guidelines,
 106 including contracting with public agencies or private entities. Funding for any such
 107 contracts will be covered by the \$0.05 portion of the monthly surcharge utilized for the
 108 telecommunications equipment distribution program.

109 ~~(i)(j)~~ The commission shall establish eligibility guidelines for participation in the audible
 110 universal information access service, taking into account a person's certified medical need.
 111 The commission shall utilize appropriate external expertise, as necessary, to establish these
 112 guidelines, including contracting with public agencies or private entities. Funding for such
 113 contracts will be covered by the 1¢ portion of the monthly surcharge utilized for the audible
 114 universal information access service.

115 ~~(j)(k)~~ The commission shall establish a telecommunications equipment distribution
 116 program advisory committee to provide input on program operation and the types of
 117 equipment to be, and being, distributed by the program. The commission shall select the
 118 equipment to be distributed by the program and shall incorporate this selection into the
 119 commission's request for proposals for a distribution agency.

120 ~~(k) The commission shall provide that the dual party telephone relay telephone system~~
 121 ~~shall be operational no later than July 1, 1991, that the telecommunications equipment~~
 122 ~~distribution program shall be operational no later than March 31, 2003, and the audible~~
 123 ~~universal information access service shall be operational no later than July 1, 2006."~~

124 **SECTION 2.**

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