

## Senate Bill 8

By: Senators Davenport of the 44th, Jones II of the 22nd, Butler of the 55th, Parent of the 42nd, Jackson of the 41st 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 create the Commission for the Blind and the Visually Impaired; to transfer  
3 the direction and supervision of Georgia Industries for the Blind from the Georgia Vocational  
4 Rehabilitation Agency to the commission; to provide for a short title; to provide for  
5 definitions; to provide for legislative intent; to provide for the transfer of functions to the  
6 commission; to provide for the composition and appointment of commission members; to  
7 provide for an executive director; to provide for duties and powers of the commission; to  
8 authorize the commission to license blind persons to operate vending facilities; to transfer  
9 the oversight of the delivery of deaf-blind services and techniques that lead to maximum  
10 independence and employment for individuals with both a hearing and a vision loss to the  
11 commission; to provide for an annual report; to provide for a complaint process; to amend  
12 Chapter 9 of Title 49 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to the transfer of  
13 the Division of Rehabilitation Services to the Department of Labor, so as to establish the role  
14 of the commission in facilitating the operation by blind persons and other persons with  
15 disabilities of vending facilities on state property; to provide for related matters; to provide  
16 for an effective date; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

17 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

18

**SECTION 1.**

19 Title 30 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to handicapped persons, is  
20 amended by revising Code Section 30-2-3, relating to supervision of Georgia Industries for  
21 the Blind by Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency and acquisition of property, as  
22 follows:

23 "30-2-3.

24 (a) The industries shall be state institutions under the direction and supervision of the  
25 ~~Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency~~ Commission for the Blind and the Visually  
26 Impaired.

27 (b) The ~~Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency~~ Commission for the Blind and the  
28 Visually Impaired is authorized to provide the property necessary for the industries. The  
29 ~~Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency~~ Commission for the Blind and the Visually  
30 Impaired may acquire real property through the State Properties Commission pursuant to  
31 Code Section 50-16-38 or the ~~agency~~ commission may enter into rental agreements in order  
32 to acquire the needed space."

33

**SECTION 2.**

34 Said title is further amended by revising Code Section 30-2-4, relating to superintendents for  
35 industries, operation of industries generally, and purchase of goods manufactured at  
36 industries by state institutions, as follows:

37 "30-2-4.

38 (a) There shall be superintendents for the industries. Preference shall be given to blind  
39 persons with the skill and experience to perform such jobs. The ~~department~~ Commission  
40 for the Blind and the Visually Impaired shall provide for the equipment, maintenance, and  
41 management of the industries; shall provide for the selection and eligibility of applicants  
42 for admission to an industry; shall provide for the sale of supplies manufactured at the  
43 industries to the departments of the state, its subdivisions, and institutions, and to the

44 federal government and other states and to individual and corporate dealers in such  
45 supplies; shall provide for housing, rationing, hours of labor, scale of pay, or division of  
46 profits, subject to this chapter; and shall provide all other rules for the proper management  
47 of the industries not in conflict with this chapter. The ~~department~~ Commission for the  
48 Blind and the Visually Impaired shall procure necessary machinery, equipment, and  
49 furnishings for the industries; shall make contracts for power, lighting, and heating; and  
50 shall arrange for all other things necessary and proper for the conduct of the industries.

51 (b) All departments, subdivisions, and institutions of the State of Georgia are directed to  
52 give preference in purchases to goods manufactured at the industries, provided said goods  
53 are of equal quality and competitive in price."

54

### SECTION 3.

55 Said title is further amended by revising Code Section 30-2-7, relating to compensation of  
56 workers and observance of and payment for state holidays, as follows:

57 "30-2-7.

58 (a) Each worker in an industry who is otherwise entitled to share in the benefits provided  
59 for blind persons under Articles 1 and 3 of Chapter 4 of Title 49 shall, in addition to the  
60 amount received as compensation for his or her services in the industry, receive from the  
61 Department of Human Services such amount of public assistance as shall be determined  
62 in accordance with the regulations approved by the commissioner of human services.

63 (b) All workers in the industries shall observe all holidays observed by other departments  
64 and agencies of the state government and shall receive their proportionate compensation  
65 for each holiday so observed. If any worker shall be compensated in such a manner that  
66 his or her daily compensation is not fixed, but rather is based upon a production basis, he  
67 or she shall receive by way of compensation for such observance of state holidays the  
68 average daily production compensation received by him or her during the immediately  
69 preceding 30 day period, holidays and Sundays excluded. The ~~Georgia Vocational~~

70 ~~Rehabilitation Agency~~ Commission for the Blind and the Visually Impaired is authorized  
71 and directed to pay such compensation from the funds appropriated to and available for the  
72 agency commission."

73 **SECTION 4.**

74 Said title is further amended by adding a new chapter to read as follows:

75 "CHAPTER 11

76 30-11-1.

77 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the 'Commission for the Blind and the  
78 Visually Impaired Act.'

79 30-11-2.

80 As used in this chapter, the term:

81 (1) 'Blind or visually impaired' means a person:

82 (A) Having a central visual acuity of 20/200 in the better eye with the best corrective  
83 lens, or a visual field of 20 degrees or less; or

84 (B) With a severe visual disability resulting in legal blindness verified by an eye  
85 examination.

86 (2) 'Commission' means the Commission for the Blind and the Visually Impaired.

87 30-11-3.

88 (a) The purpose for the establishment of a commission for the blind and the visually  
89 impaired is to ensure that people who are blind, visually impaired, or deaf-blind have  
90 access, from cradle to grave, to quality services throughout the State of Georgia so that they  
91 may attain independent living skills, maximize successful career opportunities, and

92 increase independence and self-sufficiency to promote the upward mobility of the  
93 consumer as a viable member of the community and to do whatever is deemed necessary  
94 to achieve the most positive outcome for the consumer.

95 (b) It is the policy of this state that all programs, projects, and activities of the commission  
96 shall be carried out in a manner consistent with the following principles:

97 (1) Respect for individual dignity, personal responsibility, self-determination, and pursuit  
98 of meaningful careers, based on informed choice;

99 (2) Support for the involvement of an individual's representative if an individual  
100 requests, desires, or needs such support;

101 (3) Respect for the individual's privacy and equal access, including the use of  
102 information in accessible formats; and

103 (4) Integration and full participation of individuals who are blind or visually impaired  
104 in society on equal terms with others.

105 30-11-4.

106 (a) The Commission for the Blind and the Visually Impaired is hereby created and  
107 established to perform the functions and duties set out in this chapter and to assume the  
108 duties, powers, and authority exercised on June 30, 2023, by the Georgia Vocational  
109 Rehabilitation Agency with respect to blind or visually impaired persons.

110 (b) On and after July 1, 2023, the powers, functions, duties, programs, and authority of the  
111 Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency relating to blind or visually impaired persons  
112 shall be performed and exercised by the commission. The commission shall take all  
113 necessary steps to ensure continuity of services for blind or visually impaired persons  
114 during such transfer.

115 (c) The commission shall be assigned to the Department of Human Services for  
116 administrative purposes only, as prescribed in Code Section 50-4-3.

117 30-11-5.

118 (a) The commission shall consist of a chairperson and five members. The Governor shall  
119 appoint the chairperson and one member, the Speaker of the House shall appoint two  
120 members, and the President of the Senate shall appoint two members. The chairperson and  
121 members shall be qualified to serve based on knowledge and experience in rehabilitation  
122 and related services for the blind or visually impaired. A majority of the members shall be  
123 blind or visually impaired and at least one member shall be deaf-blind. No member of the  
124 commission shall be employed by the commission during the term of such membership.

125 (b) The Governor, the Speaker of the House, and the President of the Senate shall consult  
126 with consumer groups representing blind or visually impaired persons in this state to obtain  
127 their recommendations of individuals to be appointed.

128 (c) The appointment of each member shall be for a term of three years, except for the  
129 terms of the initially appointed members. One member appointed by each officer shall  
130 serve for terms of two years, and the chairperson and the other initial appointments shall  
131 serve for terms of one year. Thereafter, all members shall be appointed for terms of three  
132 years.

133 (d) The commission shall meet quarterly and at such other times as it shall determine. The  
134 chairperson of the commission shall be elected by the members present and voting at the  
135 first meeting of the commission and annually thereafter. Commissioners shall receive no  
136 salary, but shall be allowed the usual mileage, subsistence, and per diem as authorized by  
137 law. A majority of the members of the commission shall constitute a quorum to transact  
138 business.

139 30-11-6.

140 (a) The commission shall appoint an executive director with knowledge and experience  
141 in rehabilitation and related services for the blind or visually impaired. The executive  
142 director shall serve as secretary to the commission and shall be the chief administrative

143 officer of the commission. The executive director's appointment shall be for an indefinite  
144 period but may be terminated for cause as determined by a majority of the commission.  
145 Preference shall be given to employing an individual who is blind or visually impaired and  
146 meets the qualifications specified by the commission.

147 (b) The executive director shall employ such personnel as are needed and shall fix their  
148 compensation in a manner consistent with state law.

149 30-11-7.

150 (a) The commission shall:

151 (1) Develop and carry out a state plan for vocational rehabilitation services for  
152 individuals who are blind or visually impaired pursuant to Section 101 of the federal  
153 Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended;

154 (2) Provide independent living services for blind or visually impaired individuals,  
155 including services for older individuals who are blind or visually impaired, pursuant to  
156 Title VII of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended;

157 (3) Contract with private agencies that provide services for the blind or visually impaired  
158 to provide prevocational and other training such as, but not limited to, instruction in  
159 Braille, orientation and mobility for independent travel, homemaking and  
160 home-management skills, and communications skills, including the use of computer  
161 technology, to prepare blind and visually impaired persons for eventual vocational  
162 training, job placement, higher education, home skills such as reading of mail and letter  
163 writing, and independence;

164 (4) Establish and carry out a business enterprises program and serve as the state licensing  
165 agency for blind and visually impaired individuals pursuant to the federal  
166 Randolph-Sheppard Act;

167 (5) Establish and administer an industries for the blind program and serve as the state  
168 licensing agency;

- 169 (6) Purchase and distribute specialized equipment, devices, and technology, including  
170 low-vision aids, obtained directly from specialty vendors without state centralized  
171 purchasing procedures;
- 172 (7) Coordinate with the Georgia Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled of the  
173 Office of Public Library Services of the Board of Regents of the University System of  
174 Georgia to ensure that all offerings of the program administered by the Georgia Library  
175 Service for the Blind and Print Disabled to provide library services to persons who are  
176 blind or visually impaired are actively and robustly utilized by as many blind and visually  
177 impaired persons as possible, including audiobooks, standard library services, Braille  
178 services, and other physical as well as electronic accommodation options;
- 179 (8) Create and maintain an instructional media center for the production, purchase,  
180 distribution, reallocation, and warehousing of accessible materials for blind or visually  
181 impaired children and adults;
- 182 (9) Provide technical assistance in cooperation with other appropriate agencies to assist  
183 the Department of Education and local boards of education in the provision of auxiliary  
184 aids and services to blind or visually impaired students and their parents by complying  
185 with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act, as amended, and the federal Individuals  
186 with Disabilities Education Act, as amended;
- 187 (10) Provide technical assistance to agencies within this state in order to ensure that  
188 information technology purchased or used by such agencies is accessible to and usable  
189 by individuals who are blind or visually impaired at the time the technology is purchased  
190 or used;
- 191 (11) Participate, through the designation of the executive director or an appropriate staff  
192 member of the commission, on boards, commissions, or bodies which may exist or be  
193 established within this state for the purpose of coordination and planning of services;



194 (12) Conduct a review of consumer satisfaction with programs of the commission and  
195 perform other functions of the state-wide rehabilitation council specified in Section  
196 105(c) of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended;

197 (13) Apply for and receive money from any state or federal agency to support the  
198 programs of the commission and receive on behalf of this state any gifts, donations, or  
199 bequests from any source to be used in carrying out the commission's duties as described  
200 in this chapter; and

201 (14) Develop and administer any other program which will further the provision of  
202 services to the blind or visually impaired and is determined by the commission to fall  
203 within its scope of responsibility.

204 (b) The commission may carry out any of the powers and duties enumerated in this Code  
205 section by contract or cooperative agreement or by the direct administration of any  
206 program.

207 (c) The commission shall promulgate such rules and regulations as are necessary for the  
208 execution of its functions under this chapter.

209 30-11-8.

210 The commission is authorized to license blind persons to operate vending facilities under  
211 its supervision and control, subject to rules and regulations promulgated by the  
212 commission, on:

213 (1) State property;

214 (2) County or municipal property;

215 (3) Federal property, pursuant to delegation of authority under the Randolph-Sheppard  
216 Act, 20 U.S.C. Section 107(b), and any amendment thereto or any act of Congress  
217 relating to this subject; and

218 (4) Private property.

219 30-11-9.

220 (a) The commission shall oversee the delivery of deaf-blind services and techniques  
221 provided by an organization pursuant to subsection (c) of this Code section that lead to  
222 maximum independence and employment for individuals with both a hearing and a vision  
223 loss. These services shall include, but not be limited to, transition of deaf-blind youth from  
224 education to the work force; identification of deaf-blind individuals in Georgia;  
225 communication access for varying groups of individuals and their unique needs; training  
226 deaf-blind individuals in orientation and mobility, rehabilitation, and Braille; support and  
227 increase in the number of qualified sign language interpreters working with deaf-blind  
228 individuals; use of adaptive technologies, such as computers, telebrailers, and TTY  
229 devices; strategies and techniques to assist deaf-blind individuals in obtaining the highest  
230 level of independence possible; and peer support which provides access to information,  
231 people, and places.

232 (b) The commission shall, to the greatest extent possible, integrate the services and  
233 techniques required pursuant to subsection (a) of this Code section into its standard  
234 practices and procedures with the objective of providing appropriate services in an  
235 appropriate manner to individuals in the deaf-blind community.

236 (c) Subject to appropriations by the General Assembly, the commission shall retain an  
237 organization knowledgeable on deaf-blind issues to provide the services and techniques  
238 included in subsection (a) of this Code section to deaf-blind individuals and to provide  
239 comprehensive training to commission staff on such services and techniques required  
240 pursuant to subsection (a) of this Code section. Such organization shall be retained no later  
241 than six months after funding from appropriations by the General Assembly has been made  
242 available for expenditure by the commission.

243 30-11-10.

244 The commission shall publish an annual report including a list of accomplishments,  
245 findings, and recommendations for improvement based on its activities and performance  
246 during the year. The report shall contain information needed to evaluate the progress of  
247 the commission in meeting the needs of blind or visually impaired individuals in this state.

248 30-11-11.

249 (a) Any applicant for or recipient of services from the commission who is dissatisfied with  
250 any action taken or decision made regarding such services may file a complaint, setting  
251 forth the basis for the dissatisfaction and the remedy sought. Upon receipt of the  
252 complaint, the executive director shall inform the individual of the voluntary process  
253 available for mediation of the dispute. The mediation, if chosen by the individual, shall be  
254 conducted by a qualified and impartial mediator, and the cost shall be paid by the  
255 commission.

256 (b) If the dispute cannot be resolved by mediation or other informal means, the executive  
257 director shall, upon request of the individual, convene an arbitration panel which shall give  
258 notice, conduct a hearing, and render a decision. The arbitration panel shall be composed  
259 of three members as follows:

260 (1) One individual designated by the individual filing the complaint;

261 (2) One individual designated by the executive director; and

262 (3) One individual who is an impartial hearing officer, as defined in Section 102 of the  
263 federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, agreed upon jointly by the individuals designated  
264 pursuant to paragraphs (1) and (2) of this subsection. Such individual shall serve as  
265 chairperson of the arbitration panel and issue the decision.

266 (c) The commission shall promulgate rules and regulations sufficient to regulate all  
267 proceedings conducted pursuant to this Code section and to ensure the rights of all parties  
268 participating therein."

269

**SECTION 5.**

270 Chapter 9 of Title 49 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to the transfer of  
271 the Division of Rehabilitation Services to the Department of Labor, is amended by revising  
272 Code Section 49-9-5, relating to provision of services to persons with disabilities, as follows:  
273 "49-9-5.

274 The agency shall provide the services authorized by this chapter to persons with disabilities  
275 determined to be eligible therefor; and, in carrying out the purposes of this chapter, the  
276 agency is authorized, among other things:

277 (1) To cooperate with other departments, agencies, and institutions, both public and  
278 private, in providing the services authorized by this chapter to persons with disabilities;  
279 in studying the problems involved therein; and in establishing, developing, and providing,  
280 in conformity with the purposes of this chapter, such programs, facilities, and services as  
281 may be necessary or desirable;

282 (2) To enter into reciprocal agreements with other states to provide for the services  
283 authorized by this chapter to residents of the state concerned;

284 (3) To conduct research and compile statistics relating to the provision of services or the  
285 need of services by persons with disabilities;

286 (4) To license ~~blind persons or other persons with disabilities, other than blind persons,~~  
287 to operate vending facilities under its supervision and control, subject to the terms and  
288 conditions provided in regulations, policies, and procedures issued pursuant to Code  
289 Section 49-9-3, on:

290 (A) State property;

291 (B) County or municipal property;

292 (C) Federal property, pursuant to delegation of authority under the Randolph-Sheppard  
293 Act, 20 U.S.C. Section 107(b), and any amendment thereto or any act of Congress  
294 relating to this subject; and

295 (D) Private property; and

296 (5) To provide for the establishment, supervision, and control of suitable business  
297 enterprises to be operated by persons with disabilities."

298 **SECTION 6.**

299 Said chapter is further amended by repealing Code Section 49-9-21, relating to delivery of  
300 deaf-blind services and techniques leading to maximum independence and integration, in its  
301 entirety.

302 **SECTION 7.**

303 Said chapter is further amended by revising Article 2, relating to vending facilities on state  
304 property, as follows:

305 "ARTICLE 2

306 49-9-40.

307 As used in this article, the term:

308 (1) 'State property' means any building, land, or other real property owned, leased, or  
309 occupied by any department, commission, board, bureau, agency, public corporation, or  
310 other instrumentality of the state, including, but not limited to, the Georgia Building  
311 Authority, and any other real property in which the state has a legal or beneficial interest;  
312 provided, however, that the term 'state property' shall not include any property, real or  
313 personal, owned or leased or otherwise under the jurisdiction of the Board of Regents of  
314 the University System of Georgia, the Georgia Education Authority (University), or any  
315 county or independent school system of this state.

316 (2) 'Vending facility' means vending stands, vending machines, snack bars, cart service,  
317 shelters, counters, and such other appropriate facilities and equipment as may be  
318 necessary for the sale of articles or services by ~~licensed~~ blind persons licensed by the

319 Commission for the Blind and the Visually Impaired or other persons with disabilities  
320 licensed by the agency, as prescribed by rules and regulations adopted by the  
321 Commission for the Blind and the Visually Impaired and the agency, respectively.

322 49-9-41.

323 To effectuate the purposes of this article, it is declared to be public policy of the state that  
324 on any state property where the Commission for the Blind and the Visually Impaired or the  
325 board determines it to be feasible to establish a vending facility to be operated by a licensed  
326 operator as provided in this article and where the agency or department or custodian of  
327 such property determines that such facility can be established without undue inconvenience  
328 to the operation being carried on in such state building or property, the preference accorded  
329 in this article shall require that such vending facility site not be deemed available for letting  
330 to competitive bidders for revenue-producing purposes unless the Commission for the  
331 Blind and the Visually Impaired or the board declines to establish on such site a vending  
332 facility for blind persons or other persons with disabilities. The income to the agency or  
333 department or custodian controlling the space for such facility sites shall generally not be  
334 expected to exceed reimbursement for the cost of providing such facility site space and the  
335 services connected therewith; but in any case where such income exceeds those purposes,  
336 it shall be paid into the state treasury, subject to certification and audit.

337 49-9-42.

338 For the purpose of providing blind persons or other persons with disabilities with  
339 remunerative employment, enlarging their economic opportunities, and stimulating them  
340 to greater effort in striving to make themselves self-supporting, such blind persons who are  
341 licensed by the Commission for the Blind and the Visually Impaired pursuant to Code  
342 Section 30-11-7 or other persons with disabilities who are licensed by the Georgia  
343 Vocational Rehabilitation Agency pursuant to Code Section 49-9-5 shall be authorized to

344 operate vending facilities on any state property where such vending facilities may be  
345 properly and satisfactorily operated by blind persons or other persons with disabilities. In  
346 authorizing the operation of vending facilities on state property, preference shall be given,  
347 so far as feasible, to blind persons licensed by the Commission for the Blind and the  
348 Visually Impaired or other persons with disabilities licensed by the Georgia Vocational  
349 Rehabilitation Agency as provided in this article; and the head of each department or  
350 agency in control of the maintenance, operation, and protection of state property shall, after  
351 consultation with the Commission for the Blind and the Visually Impaired and the board  
352 and with the approval of the Governor, prescribe regulations designed to assure such  
353 preference (including assignment of vending machine income to achieve and protect such  
354 preference) for such licensed blind persons or other persons with disabilities without  
355 unduly inconveniencing such departments and agencies or adversely affecting the interests  
356 of the state."

357 **SECTION 8.**

358 This Act shall become effective on July 1, 2023.

359 **SECTION 9.**

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