



*Audio Access for the Blind  
or Print-Challenged*

Feb. 27, 2015

Good evening:

I am Diane Weaver Dunne, the executive director of CRIS Radio.

We all must share in the fiscal pain as the state reduces its spending due to a significant budget deficit. I am here to urge you not to completely eliminate all state support for CRIS Radio, the state's ONLY RADIO-READING SERVICE for people who are blind or print disabled.

CRIS makes its service available to nearly 30,000 people who are blind or print disabled – including those who have learning, physical, intellectual or emotional disabilities.

Our service is provided without charge to our listeners and only a modest cost of \$83,000 to the state. This figure represents approximately 20 percent of CRIS' annual budget, with the balance of our budget coming from the generosity of others, including area foundations, Lions Clubs and other civic organizations, individual donations and fundraising events.

We operate a very efficient operation, and have reduced dependency on state funding from nearly 50% to 20% during the past five years by introducing new programs and seeking new funders.

The state's support is a bargain considering that CRIS operates a nearly \$1 million service on half that amount. CRIS is truly a statewide effort with more than 300 volunteers who contribute their time and talent to produce and record our programs -- an estimated annual value of \$379,000.

Consider the value to the state: Every state employee who works with people who are blind has CRIS Radio in their toolkit as a method to help people who are blind stay informed about current events, expand their

knowledge, help them make informed decisions, provide teachers of students who are blind or print disabled with educational tools, and help promote independence and self-sufficiency

Consider how different your life would be without access to print information? From reading about far-away places in the National Geographic to learning what's on sale at your local grocery store? How would you learn if an old friend had passed away?

That's why there is CRIS.

Consider again if you were unable to read about diverse opinions featured in editorials or op-ed pieces? How would you learn about the details of Gov. Malloy's budget proposal? How would you learn when and where to vote?

Access to information is essential to all of us. While TV and mainstream radio briefly present the news of the day, they do not provide the breadth and depth of information offered by newspapers and magazines

That's why there is CRIS.

Don't take my word for it. Listen to what CRIS listeners and their families have to say:

Ronnie Zoback from Tolland, CT said about her father: "As time marched on and his visual impairment grew, his inability to access the printed word was perhaps one of the most devastating things on his journey. ... Purely by chance, we learned of CRIS Radio, and knew quickly we had found a treasure. He went from feeling thoroughly isolated to now having a renewed connection to the outside world. CRIS Radio saved my father's life."

Here are some words from Rosie Morline of Rocky Hill: "Over 30 years ago, CRIS opened a whole new world for me and my fellow blind friends of Connecticut. I have been blind all of my life and never knew what it was like to read a daily newspaper. CRIS became our newsstand. Magically, local and national newspapers, grocery store circulars, magazines, comes to us through our special radio."

Consider Nyema Pinkney , chairwomen of the Board of Education and Services for the Blind State Rehabilitation Council: “As a fully sighted person suddenly stricken with legal blindness eight years ago, I found myself unable to read print materials on my own. Feeling discouraged, I was introduced by CRIS Radio by the Department of Rehabilitation Services/BESB immediately with the hopes my thirst for reading, learning and professional development could continue.

CRIS is personal to me. My dad was not blind; but he was print disabled. He had undiagnosed dyslexia and felt stupid in school, so he quit at 14 years old. Today, CRIS provides services for students like my dad. They can follow along in a magazine or classroom book while listening to a recording downloaded onto a MP3 player. Instead of feeling stupid, they can “read” like their classmates with the help of our audio services.

And, that’s why there is CRIS!

Please do not cut all funding to CRIS.

Thank you.

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