



*Audio Access for the Blind
or Print-Challenged*

Feb. 11, 2016

Appropriations Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
Hartford, Conn.

Good evening Rep. Bye, Rep. Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify about the importance of CRIS Radio. I am Diane Weaver Dunne, the executive director of CRIS Radio.

CRIS Radio understands that we must share in the state's budget cuts. And we have. During the past two years, state funding to CRIS has decreased by 17%.

Please do not completely eliminate all state support for CRIS Radio. It will put our operation at risk.

Imagine for a moment that you are blind or have a print disability and unable to read. Where would you turn? The answer would be CRIS – where thousands go to for their news and information that is not available anywhere else.

No one would argue about the need for our service. And the appropriation is a bargain to the state, considering the responsibility of providing our service would most likely fall on the state at a far greater cost than the current appropriation of \$71,000.

Access to information is essential to all of us. It is far more than a quality of life issue. Information helps us make decisions about who to vote for, how to spend our money, where to live....

Information is critical to our lives. And CRIS is critical to those we serve.

CRIS is far more than a 90 second news clip—I'm talking about having the ability to read—or listen to--- a complete news story as it is written in the newspaper---about healthcare reform and how it may impact you---about access to the weekly grocery and department store fliers to help people make the best buying decisions for their families.

This is not something you get from your standard headline news on TV and radio—you only get it from your local papers and national magazines---and, if you are unable to read print--- you can only get it from CRIS Radio. **It is information that most of us take for granted.**

Again, CRIS is a bargain to the state for the service we make available. Consider that CRIS makes its service available to the BESB teachers who serve approximately 1,000 students who are blind or visually impaired with audio versions of children's magazines and more than 600 titles of classroom materials.

State and federal laws require students with disabilities have access to the same classroom materials as their peers. Who would provide this recording service? It would likely fall on the state and the schools. At what cost? Surely it would be far greater than the current appropriation.

Also consider that 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. **Again**, if CRIS is unable to maintain its operation, it may very well fall to the state to provide it.

We have done an outstanding job of funding our service through private foundations, individuals, and civic organizations who share our commitment. We do not rely entirely on state funding. The state money we receive represents just 12.5% of our annual operating budget, but it is vital to our continuing operation.

The reason it is so important is because many of our funding sources restrict their financial support for specific projects and initiatives, but the state funding we receive provides needed dollars for general operational expenses. The state's support literally makes it possible for CRIS to keep the lights on.

Submitted with my testimony are a number of letters from CRIS listeners who have asked me to share their testimony with you.

Over the years, we have expanded our core service to include all individuals who struggle to read print--- individuals with vision impairment, or traumatic brain injury, those with severe arthritis or students with dyslexia or other learning disabilities. We serve 45 schools and we even have a special service streaming audio of children's magazines to the CT Children's Medical Center.

Please remember that CRIS is the **ONLY** radio-reading service in Connecticut. If not CRIS, then who? The state? And at what cost?

We recognize and appreciate the financial situation the state faces, but eliminating us entirely from the budget puts our service at risk and could cost the state far more in the long run.

Please help CRIS keep its lights on!

Respectfully yours,
Diane Weaver Dunne
Executive Director
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