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## 2024 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FROM THE BLIND OF VIRGINIA

<p><b>Priority 1: Modernize governmental procurement of accessible technology.</b> <b>Action: Co-Sponsor H.B. ____ (Del. Kathy Tran)</b></p>
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**Issue:** Virginia school districts and colleges often fail to provide and implement technology that accommodates the accessibility needs of students with disabilities. Despite a robust market for inclusive education technology and established accessibility standards for over two decades, Virginia school boards do not prioritize accessibility when selecting technology products. This oversight, in violation of federal and state laws mandating accessibility, leads to the procurement of technology that is unusable for students with disabilities making it impossible for students with disabilities to compete on terms of equality.

While Virginia colleges and other Commonwealth entities are explicitly required to consider accessibility in their procurement process under the Virginia Information Technology Accessibility Act (ITAA), the law is outdated, having not been substantially updated since 1999. Consequently, it fails to address the evolving landscape of technology and accessibility requirements. For example, since 2013, the federal Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has signed resolution agreements with 173 Commonwealth entities due to disability discrimination, many of which involve inaccessible technology—imposing substantial negative budgetary impacts on state and local governments.

Finally, other Virginia governmental entities' technology, including websites and apps, is often inaccessible. This creates challenges for citizens with disabilities in activities such as voting, obtaining crucial information during weather or health crises, and even finding someone in the government to speak to about accessibility issues.

**Solution:** This bill modernizes the ITAA, equipping Virginia governmental entities with the necessary tools to comply with federal and state laws mandating accessible technology, including Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act, the Virginia and Americans with Disabilities Acts, the Virginia Human Rights Act, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This bill does not create additional legal requirements beyond those found in other laws but provides Virginia governmental entities and school systems practical guidance to ensure compliance with current access requirements. Importantly, the bill extends coverage to all individuals with disabilities, not just those who are blind or have low vision, and includes K-12 education given the growing role of technology in the student experience. Finally, the updates in this bill not only modernize the outdated technological language found in the current version of the ITAA but also provide the public with a mechanism to give feedback, as required under other applicable laws.

<p><b>Priority 2: Enable blind and low vision people to access prescription drug labeling.</b> <b>Action: Co-Sponsor H.B. 516 (Del. Patrick Hope)</b></p>
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**Issue:** Over 160,000 individuals in Virginia, reporting blindness or severe difficulty seeing, face challenges reading information on prescription medication labels and the other information provided by the pharmacist. This particularly affects senior citizens who are more prone to prescription medication use, leading to difficulties in understanding dosage, directions for use, side effects, and interactions with other medications.

People who are blind or have low vision currently manage their medication in alternative ways, such as noting the size of the bottle or the shape of the pill, or by placing a rubber band around the bottle or attaching some other tactile identifier. However, the more types of medication that are taken, the harder it becomes to remember the specifics of each one and label it appropriately using these alternative methods. It is easy to imagine how mistakes can happen, for example, if the pharmacist puts the medication in a different size container or the manufacturer changes the shape of the pill. We know many individuals who have made errors using these methods. Accessible labeling will significantly help address these issues. While some pharmacies offer accessible labeling, it is not universal. Individuals who do not drive due to their limited vision must obtain their prescription from the closest pharmacy, making it essential that all pharmacies provide accessible medication services. Various states, including Nevada, Oregon, Tennessee, Hawaii, Maryland, and Puerto Rico have already addressed this issue through legislation or regulations.

**Solution:** HB516 requires accessible labeling for prescription medication containers, allowing individuals to choose their preferred format. Various means, such as ScripTalk, enable pharmacists to create audible labels in English and translated languages, making script information accessible for those who are blind, have low vision, or face other reading challenges, all at a minimal annual cost.

## **ABOUT THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND**

The National Federation of the Blind is America's largest and most active organization of blind people. With tens of thousands of members nationwide, we are not an "agency" claiming to speak for the blind; we are blind people speaking for ourselves. In Virginia, we are organized into 12 local chapters throughout the Commonwealth, and into various special interest divisions.