

JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE HEARING FISCAL YEAR 2021 BUDGET



SANDI MILLER
DIVISION DIRECTOR

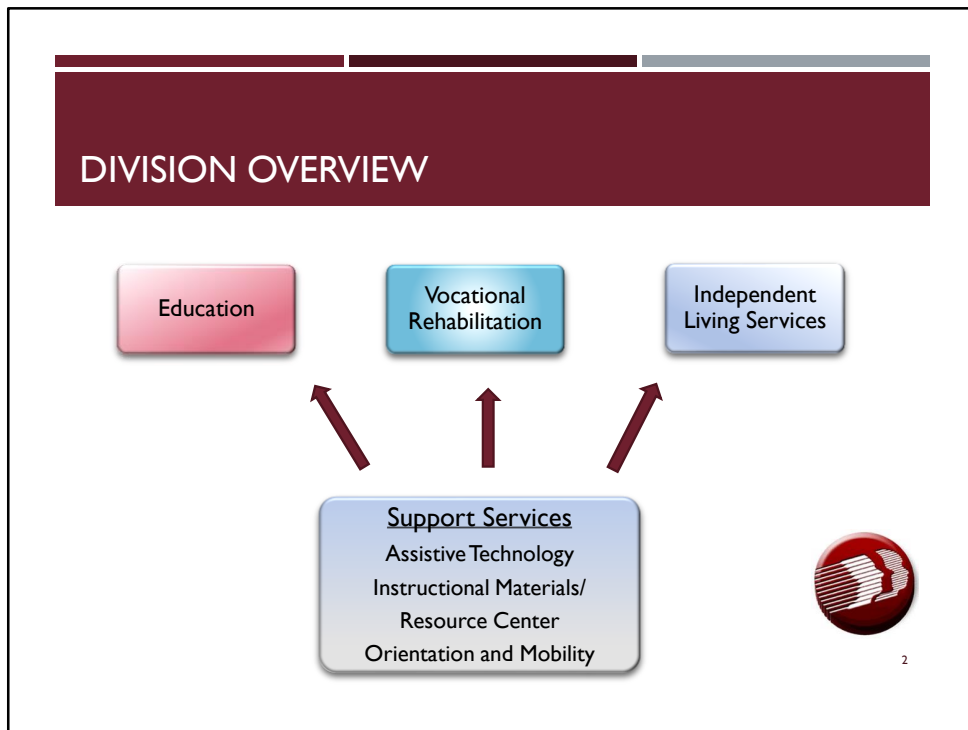
DIVISION FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED
Department of Health and Social Services
FEBRUARY 25, 2020
Legislative Hall, Joint Finance Committee Hearing Room

Comments available online at <https://dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/pubs.html>

Good Afternoon Senator McDowell, Representative Johnson, members of the Joint Finance Committee and members of the public.

I am Sandi Miller, Director of the Division for the Visually Impaired. With me today is Debbie Talley, my Deputy Director, and Olu Ogunsola, Senior Fiscal Administrative Officer.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today and present our accomplishments and Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Governor's Recommended Budget.



The mission of the Division for the Visually Impaired (DVI) is to provide educational, vocational and technical support to empower and foster independence for Delawareans with visual impairments. All DVI programs listed on this slide directly serve consumers.

DVI services are designed to meet the vision-related needs of everyone from birth to senior citizens, through three main areas:

- **Education:** Our Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs) provide itinerant services to students - including toddlers and infants - with visual impairments in all settings: Local Education Agencies (LEAs), charter schools, private schools, homes, daycare and medical facilities.
- **Vocational Rehabilitation:** VR counselors provide teens transitioning from high school and adults seeking employment with assistance in preparing for, obtaining and maintaining employment.
- **Independent Living:** Consumers are provided adaptive techniques and access to assistive technology designed to promote independence and aging in place.

GETTING TO KNOW DVI

Visual categories of DVI consumers:

- Totally blind - 5%
- Legally blind - 65%
- Severely visually impaired - 30%

Age range of DVI consumers:

- Birth-17: 30%
- 18-60: 35%
- 61 and over: 35%



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I'd like to give you a little background on the Division. Last year, DVI served over 900 individuals who are severely visually impaired, legally blind and totally blind. This slide depicts the breakdown by visual category and age. The majority of our consumers are legally blind, however the ages are spread pretty evenly across the three age groups.

DVI maintains an electronic registry of more than 3,500 consumers. Placement on this registry allows for consumers to access the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled which provides free books in Braille or audio format. DVI also uses the registry for communications regarding agency events, workshops and other important information that may be relevant to Delawareans who are blind or visually impaired. Our services are available to all individuals on the registry.

It's estimated that 19,000 Delawareans could be living with significant vision loss according to the most recent American Community Survey. The incidence of vision loss is predicted to grow rapidly over the course of the next decade due to our aging population and the ongoing obesity epidemic. DVI regularly engages in community events to reach those not accessing vision rehabilitation services.

To illustrate a little of what DVI does, I'd like to explain the picture on this slide. Here we have Heather, one our Orientation & Mobility Specialists with Landen, one of her students. Together they make tactile maps, which they are holding here, to help Landen navigate throughout the community. On this particular day, Landen independently used this map to safely navigate from school to Rita's Water Ice.

STUDENT ANALYSIS

| Learning Tools 10th Grade Physics class | For a sighted student | Materials | For a visually impaired/ blind student | Equipment |
|---|-----------------------------|--|--|--|
| Writing/ Printing Equipment | \$218 | paper, pens, pencils, printer and paper | \$5,298 | braillewriter/braille paper, braille embosser/tractor-feed braille paper |
| Physics textbook | \$80 | one print volume | \$26,441 | 38 braille volumes plus transcription |
| Calculator | \$135 | graphing calculator | \$559 | graphing calculator with speech |
| Portable Technology Aids | \$150 | tablet | \$1,845 | tablet with refreshable braille display |
| Laptop | \$1,000 | Laptop | \$2,000 | Laptop with screen reader software |
| Total | \$1,583 | | \$36,183 | |

Courtesy of American Printing House for the Blind.

I'm not going to go over this slide in detail, however, it is **estimated that as much as 90% of learning is visual** so I thought it was important to put this up for you to see – this shows how much it costs to educate a student who is visually impaired versus a student who is sighted. The cost to supply a student who is blind or visually impaired with materials commensurate to those of their sighted peers is almost \$35,000 more – and this is for just one 10th grade class!

Educating students who are blind or visually impaired requires an additional 17 credits beyond a Special Education degree. As we've shared with you previously, there is a national shortage of Teachers of the Visually Impaired, however, DVI has been aggressive in pursuing new teachers. The positions are posted continually on the state website and postings are sent to all members of the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired - a membership organization dedicated exclusively to professionals who provide services to persons with vision loss. DVI also offers tuition assistance and the State now provides student loan repayment assistance. As such, DVI currently has 15 teachers serving 292 students – a ratio of 19 to 1, better than the 28 to 1 which is mandated in Delaware code.

To further demonstrate the work done by our division, we have a book produced by our Materials Center – this is the book “Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry” – this is a typical required reading book for middle school students. This book weighs about 6 ounces and fits neatly in a backpack. The Braille version is 5 oversized books that weigh more than 10 pounds.

FY 2021 GOVERNOR'S RECOMMENDED BUDGET

FY 2021 Governor's Recommended Budget (\$ in thousands)

| | GF | ASF | NSF | Total |
|--------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| FTEs | 52.4 | 0 | 18.6 | 71.0 |
| Dollars (\$) | 5,477.4 | 1,050.0 | 1,169.3 | 7,696.7 |



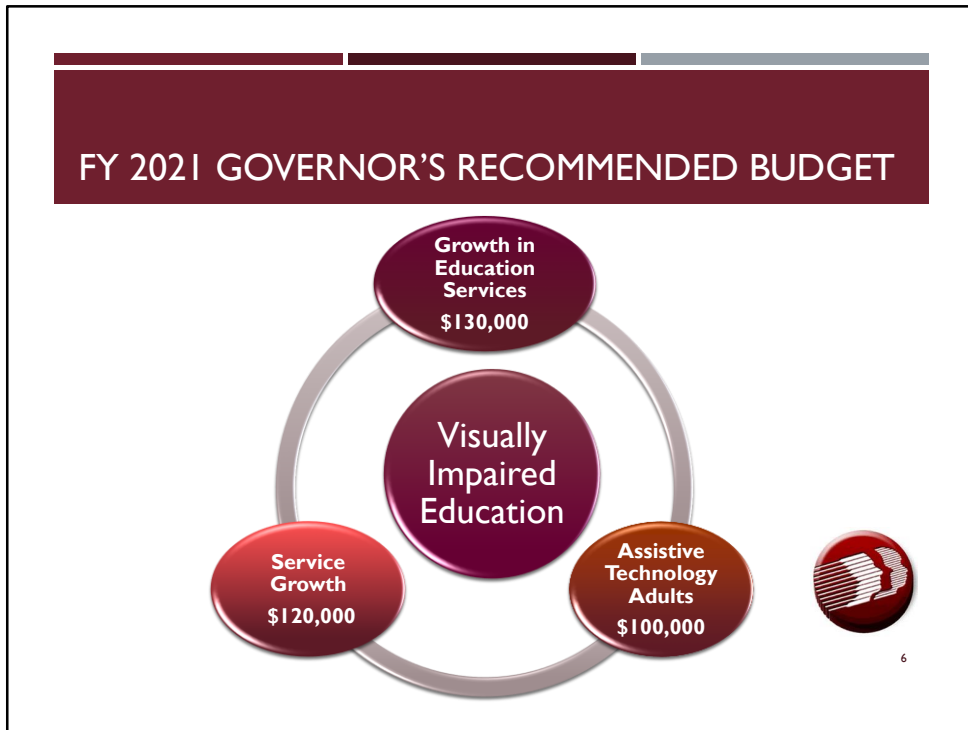
Budget Definitions:

GF – General Funds
ASF – Appropriated Special Funds
NSF – Non-Appropriated Special Funds
FTEs – Full Time Equivalent Positions

The slide above shows the budget included in the FY 2021 Governor's Recommended Budget (GRB).

Our Division's FY 2021 GRB is:

- \$5,477.4 [Five Million, Four Hundred Seventy-Seven Thousand, Four Hundred dollars] in General Funds (GF);
- \$1,050.0 [One Million, Fifty Thousand dollars] in Appropriated Special Fund (ASF) spending authority; and
- \$1,169.3 [One Million, One Hundred Sixty-Nine Thousand, Three Hundred dollars] in Non-Appropriated Special Funds (NSF).



The FY 2021 Governor's Recommended Budget includes the following:

- **\$130.0** to address growth in student educational services; and
- **\$120.0** to address growth in adult services.

These funds will be used to provide educational wraparound services and employment supports in order to address the customized service needs that are unique to every individual and ensure all eligible consumers continue to receive our services.

In addition, this budget includes a **One Time Supplemental Appropriation of \$100.0** for Assistive Technology Equipment. As vision related disabilities are expected to grow and technology options continue to change, this funding will add resources for higher-end assistive technology for independent living consumers and supplement current resources for vocational rehabilitation to improve functional capabilities of our consumers.

LOOKING AHEAD



DVI is committed to continuous improvement. In order to identify needs and provide more training and technical assistance on the various assistive technology devices used by our students, we have developed an Education Assistive Technology Trainer position. This position will offer more support to students, families, DVI Teachers and district personnel.

The Division is also restructuring our Assistive Technology Centers to build a more robust and accessible program. This will include space to accommodate group and individual training, improve how we track and place resources directly to consumers, and enhance opportunities for individuals with visual impairments to explore and learn about new and relevant technology.

DVI recognizes the importance of collaboration and our role as a core partner under the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA). As such, DVI is working with the Department of Education, Local Education Agencies, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Division of Developmental Disabilities Services, DVI's education and vocational rehabilitation staff and the National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity to support the PIPEline to Career Success for Students with Disabilities (SWD) initiative .

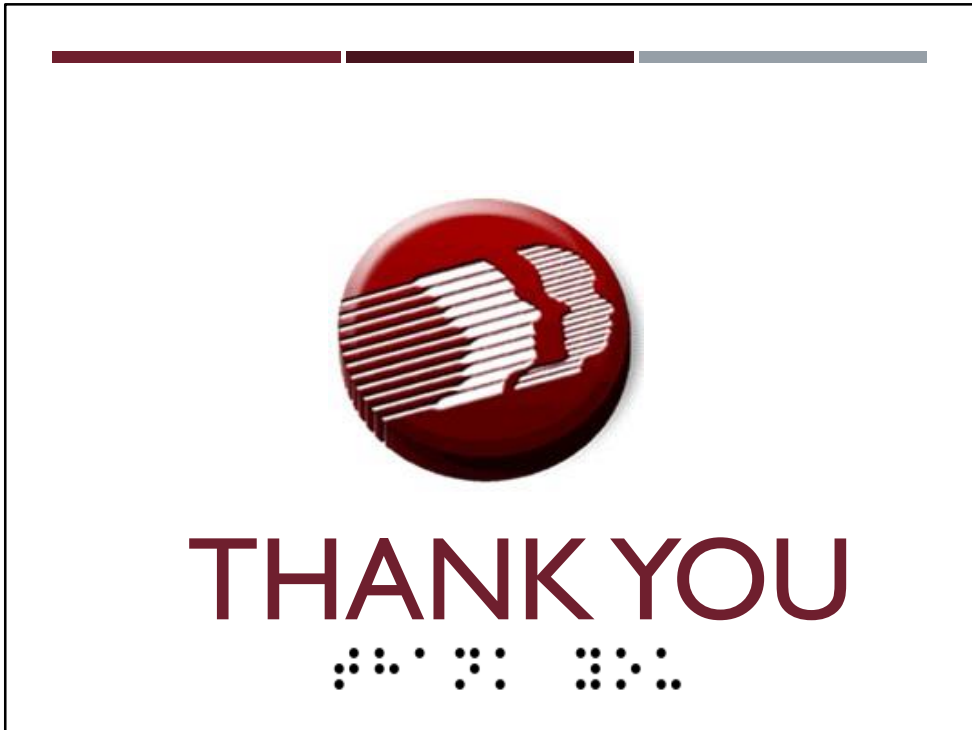
LOOKING AHEAD



The purpose of the project is to increase the number of SWD, including those with the most significant disabilities, who:

- Enroll in Career and Technical Education (CTE) career pathways
- Participate in related work-based learning experiences in authentic employment settings
- Earn college and career credentials in CTE career pathways
- Graduate from high school as a CTE career pathway completer
- Continue their education and training beyond high school and
- Enter in-demand employment

DVI is committed to enhancing partnerships and expanding services to improve the lives of individuals experiencing vision loss.



Thank you for the opportunity to share with you the challenges and opportunities facing the Division for the Visually Impaired.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.