Report on the Responses of the
Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired
To the Impact of the
Aging of Virginia’s Population
Submitted November 14, 2007

Pursuant to legislation enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia, the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired submits this report of its progress in addressing the impact of the aging of Virginia’s population.
Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired
November 14, 2007

[Signature]

Joseph A. Bowman, Commissioner
November 14, 2007
The Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired provides a broad array of services to visually eligible citizens over the age of 60. Most of these services fall under the department’s Rehabilitation Teaching/Independent Living program and are designed to give consumers instruction in non-visual techniques and the use of adaptive equipment to enable them to maintain their maximum level of independence in the home and community. Most services are delivered directly to consumers in their homes/communities. During SFY 2007 the agency served 1881 Virginians who were age 65 or older; of these, 821 were 85 or older. In the last four years the number of individuals 85 years and older who received agency services increased by 13%.

The department has identified two issues that will impact its delivery of services within the next few years. First, in light of the fact that the leading causes of vision loss are age related, projections of a significant increase in the number of older Virginians in the coming years will lead to a significant increase in the number of individuals who will require services from the agency. Second, tomorrow’s seniors will be much more familiar with technology and there will be an increased demand for training for seniors with vision loss in the use of assistive technology that will allow them to continue to use the computer as a tool to maintain their independence.

With regard to the effects of aging on the agency’s workforce, we recognize that a significant number of staff that makes up our management team is or will soon be eligible for retirement. Our Workforce Planning Team is currently developing a succession plan that incorporates staff development training, mentoring and job shadowing to encourage younger staff to improve their skills so that they may take advantage of opportunities for upward mobility. We will also be looking nationwide for leaders in the field that could be good candidates to fill key management positions.
Agency Description

**Mission Statement:**

The mission of the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) is to empower individuals who are blind, vision impaired or deaf-blind to achieve their maximum levels of employment, education, and personal independence.

**Agency Vision:**

DBVI envisions a world in which blind, vision impaired and deaf-blind people can access all that society has to offer. We believe this is achievable.

**Agency Values:**

We value the contributions of people who are blind, deaf-blind, and vision impaired.
We value equal access to all life activities, including information, education, training, and employment.
We value integrity, honesty and teamwork.
We value diversity, respect for the individual and personal choice.
We value our employees for their dedication and expertise.

The Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) is committed to providing quality services to assist Virginia's citizens who are blind, deafblind or vision impaired in achieving their maximum level of employment, education, and personal independence. The department provides an array of specialized services to blind Virginians of all ages to assist them in attaining the skills, confidence and positive outlook that are critical to independence.

Our primary focus is to assist blind Virginians in achieving quality employment outcomes. Vocational evaluation, job training,
jobdevelopment, placement, follow-up and other services are provided to assist consumers in obtaining jobs in the public and private sectors.

Training for and employment as food service managers and vendors are available in cafeterias, snack bars, and other vending facilities in public and private buildings. The Virginia Industries for the Blind provides another employment option for blind Virginians at its two plant locations in Charlottesville and Richmond, its satellite store operations and administrative service positions across the Commonwealth.

Assessments and training to assist blind consumers in achieving their independent living goals are available in areas such as skills of daily living, home management, orientation and mobility, Braille and other communication skills, and use of adaptive technologies.

Low Vision services assist individuals with decreasing vision of all ages in utilizing their remaining vision to maximum benefit. Optical aids benefit many people with some residual vision in the areas of employment, educational pursuits, and independent living and leisure activities. Specialized assessments and technical assistance assist consumers and service providers in meeting the needs of consumers who are deafblind, i.e. have combined vision and hearing losses.

The department's Library and Resource Center provides Braille, large print and recorded materials to increase consumers' knowledge and educational achievement as well as providing for leisure reading. The department also collaborates with schools to assist in the education of blind, deafblind or visually impaired students.

Advancements in technology have opened many doors to blind people - opportunities that previously were inaccessible and unavailable. We value the importance of technology in employment, education, and independent living. One of our priorities is to remain on the leading edge of technological solutions that bring positive benefits to our customers.

Our staff are highly trained and committed to assist Virginia's blind, deafblind, and vision impaired citizens in reaching their full potential. The department's services and training programs are available in consumers' home communities or at the residential Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired in Richmond. By participating in the training
opportunities the department offers, blind consumers develop the skills, confidence and positive outlook they need to achieve their goals.

1. To the extent such data is available, the number of persons who received services from the agency in the past fiscal year who fell into each of the following age ranges: 65-74, 75-84 and 85 and older.

The Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired served the following number of consumers in the specified age ranges through its Rehabilitation Teaching/Independent Living program for FY’s 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>SFY 2007</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-84</td>
<td>698</td>
<td>833</td>
<td>856</td>
<td>877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85+</td>
<td>821</td>
<td>822</td>
<td>823</td>
<td>728</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Identify the agency services that are utilized by senior citizens 65 and older in significant numbers. Indicate whether the agency has the capacity at present to serve all interested seniors or whether the demand for certain services exceeds the agency’s capacity. If so, does the agency maintain waiting lists for services?

DBVI offers a wide array of independent living services that benefit our senior population such as personal and home management, daily living skills training, adjustment to blindness counseling, communication skills (handwriting, keyboarding, Braille, personal recording devices and assistive technology for computer use), crafts and leisure skills, and training in the use of prescription low vision aids. The services that are most often planned as part of an individual’s rehab program are adjustment counseling, daily living skills training and assessment and training in the use of low vision aids designed to maximize an individual’s ability to use any functional vision that they have. The department does not utilize waiting lists for services at this time. Because we do not utilize waiting lists some seniors who need our services experience delays in eligibility determination and the frequency with which our teachers can provide direct
instruction due to the number of consumers that each Rehabilitation Teacher serves. Additionally, estimates of the number of older Virginians experiencing vision loss far exceeds the actual number of consumers referred for services. We believe there are many more senior Virginians with significant vision loss that could benefit from DBVI services if they were aware that the services existed. The agency currently has a committee that is exploring ways in which we can better market our services in order to reach more customers. In light of the fact that the leading causes of vision loss are age related, projections of a significant increase in the number of older Virginians in the coming years will lead to an equally significant increase in the number of individuals who will require services from our agency.

3. Identify current agency programs, specifically designed to serve seniors 65 and older, that fall into any of the following six categories: Health Care/Wellness; Education; Public Safety; Recreation; Financial Security (including Housing); and Transportation.

The agency’s Rehabilitation Teaching/Independent Living program provides individualized services identified through a thorough functional assessment of the consumer. Many of these services can be categorized under the following categories:

**Health Care/Wellness** – diabetic management including the use of non-visual methods to obtain blood glucose readings and administer insulin injections; evaluation of and provision of adaptive equipment related to secondary disabilities; alternative methods to identify and administer medications; training on alternative methods of food preparation to insure proper nutrition; adjustment to blindness counseling to reduce depression and improve self-esteem

**Education** – Braille instruction; communication skills instruction (such as use of recording devices or writing guides); registration for Library of Congress Talking Book Program and use of playback devices; information on correspondence courses designed especially for blind individuals

**Recreation** – leisure skills training including the use of tactual methods to complete crafts projects and accessing board/card games that have been adapted for use by the blind
Financial Security (including Housing) – training in the use of alternative methods for maintaining financial records such as large print checks/check registers and using assistive technology to access financial related computer programs

Transportation – Orientation and Mobility instruction designed to provide consumers with the skills necessary to safely utilize public transportation and provide information on locally available transportation resources.

4. Identify the extent to which your agency provides “consumer-oriented” publications and websites online that are designed to be “senior-friendly”. If the information you currently provide is not readily accessible to seniors, identify any steps your agency is taking to improve accessibility.

The agency website meets accessibility standards and all consumer oriented publications are provided in alternative media including large print, Braille or tape upon request.

5. Describe the effect that the aging of the agency’s own workforce will have on its ability to deliver services.

The aging of the DBVI workforce is an issue that is focused on through our Workforce Planning efforts. Although we do not expect all staff to retire upon reaching eligibility for full retirement, it is important to note that 58% of our Headquarters Management Team is currently eligible for retirement and 83% will be eligible by 2009. This includes all of the Senior Management Team. Agency wide, 15% of our staff has 30 or more years of service. Retirements will surely have an effect on most of our programs as the established leadership and institutional knowledge they possess may be lost due to retirements. On a positive note, only one of our six Regional Managers is currently eligible for full retirement so the day to day supervision of our direct services staff is anticipated to remain strong for several years. To address the anticipated increase in staff retirements our Workforce Planning Team is developing a succession plan that incorporates staff development training, mentoring and job shadowing to encourage younger staff to improve their skills so that they may take advantage of opportunities for upward mobility. The Department has a positive national reputation and as such we will continue to recruit nationally to attract leaders from other states to apply for vacant leadership and direct service positions. When filling our Rehabilitation Center Director position in 2006 we had an applicant pool in which 4 of the 6 applicants
screened in were from out of state. With the limited number of individuals trained in the field of blind rehabilitation and the high demand for their skills and expertise nationally we do not anticipate significant, if any, salary savings associated with filling vacancies created through retirements. To remain competitive we will have to pay competitive salaries. The additional cost of paying out accumulated annual and sick leave balances further mitigates potential savings.

6. Describe any other services or programs that the agency has implemented or plans to implement in the future to address the impact of the aging of Virginia’s population.

A significant challenge that the agency has identified is the growing demand by seniors for technology. Tomorrow’s seniors who lose vision will consist of individuals who have used technology such as the personal computer and other devices for professional and personal use. We anticipate a significant increase in the demand for assistive technology training from seniors with vision loss. With appropriate equipment and training seniors who become blind or visually impaired can use the computer for communication with family and friends, to shop over the Internet, conduct business transactions, do research, access health and other information, and maintain a greater level of independence and a better quality of life. The agency will need to identify appropriate funding sources that will cover the cost of personnel and technology required to meet this emerging need.