

Robert Maier, Director
Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners

Dear Mr. Maier,

The Perkins Braille and Talking Book Library and the Worcester Talking Book Library are vital and essential elements in the lives of the blind and visually impaired in Massachusetts.

The blind have been long plagued by severe unemployment. Adaptive technology is key to overcoming barriers that exist in many classes of employment. While adaptive technology is becoming more and more pervasive in the blindness community, the penetration rates are low for a number of reasons.

The BTBL has long understood the power and value of outreach as a means to inform and educate members of the blindness community of the information and literary resources available to them. The Braille and Talking Book systems are undergoing a revolutionary transformation to digital technology. The BTBL's will soon find themselves rolling out digital technology to many individuals who have never been exposed to this technology. As more individuals experience the power of digital technology themselves, adaptive technology use will increase, enabling the blind as a class to live their lives more independently. The complexities and implications of such a transformation cannot be underestimated.

I am 53 years old and have been legally blind all my life. I rejoined the Perkins BTBL two years ago after I was contacted via their outreach. Although I have been gainfully employed for 30 years, I had not read a book for about that long.

Digital technology may well over time, reduce costs and streamline library operations. Technology transformation always is accompanied by increased cost during the transformation period. I understand that the BTBL has requested a modest budget increase for 2008. A level funding approach for the next year will put the needed transformation projects at risk and will most certainly reduce services at a time when outreach should be increased.

I urge you to grant the BTBL's the budget they requested to allow the transformation to occur without impeding existing service levels.

Sincerely,

Rick E. Morin
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