

OFFICE FOR THE BLIND

MISSION

The Executive Budget recommends the creation of a new Office for the Blind (OFB) to assume responsibility for rehabilitative services to legally blind residents of New York State.

ORGANIZATION AND STAFFING

The 2007-08 Executive Budget recommends the transfer of the Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped (CBVH) from the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) to the new Office for the Blind.

The Office will be headed by an Executive Director who will be appointed by the Governor. A fifteen member board will help guide the administration and coordination of programs and policies designed to provide legally blind individuals with effective rehabilitation services. The majority of Office staff will consist of vocational rehabilitation counselors, mobility instructors, business service specialists, instructors for the blind, food service management specialists and administrative support staff.

FISCAL BACKGROUND AND BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

Legislation submitted with the budget to establish the OFB will also authorize the transfer of CBVH state operations funding, appropriated in OCFS, to OFB effective October 1, 2007. The majority of Office funding will be from Federal grants. Programs and operations will also be supported by General Fund dollars, and a share of profits from vending stands operated by legally blind individuals, and vending machines placed by companies at highway rest stops.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

The Office for the Blind will assume responsibility for programs and operations that serve over 10,000 legally blind individuals. This includes the Vocational Rehabilitation program that serves approximately 4,200 legally blind individuals. Major services provided include vision and job skills assessments, on-the-job training, independent living skills, mobility training, academic instruction, case management, assistance with transportation and other personal and financial issues, as well as referrals to community services.

The Office will continue to serve approximately 100 legally blind individuals and their employees through the Business Enterprise Program that develops jobs in the food service and vending stand industries. Another 600 legally blind individuals are placed in independent employment situations with governmental entities and other employers.

Through its Non-Vocational Rehabilitation program, the Office will provide services that focus on daily living skills to approximately 5,500 legally blind children and elderly individuals. Services include learning how to use adaptive equipment such as devices that allow the legally blind to discern printed material or convert text into Braille documents, vision exams, skill assessments, mobility training and case management.