

# Presentation to the 2025 Health and Human Services Joint Appropriations Subcommittee

## Disability Employment and Transitions Division Human Services Practice



DEPARTMENT OF  
**PUBLIC HEALTH &  
HUMAN SERVICES**

Greg Gianforte, Governor | Charlie Brereton, Director

# Overview

*Chanda Hermanson, Division Administrator*



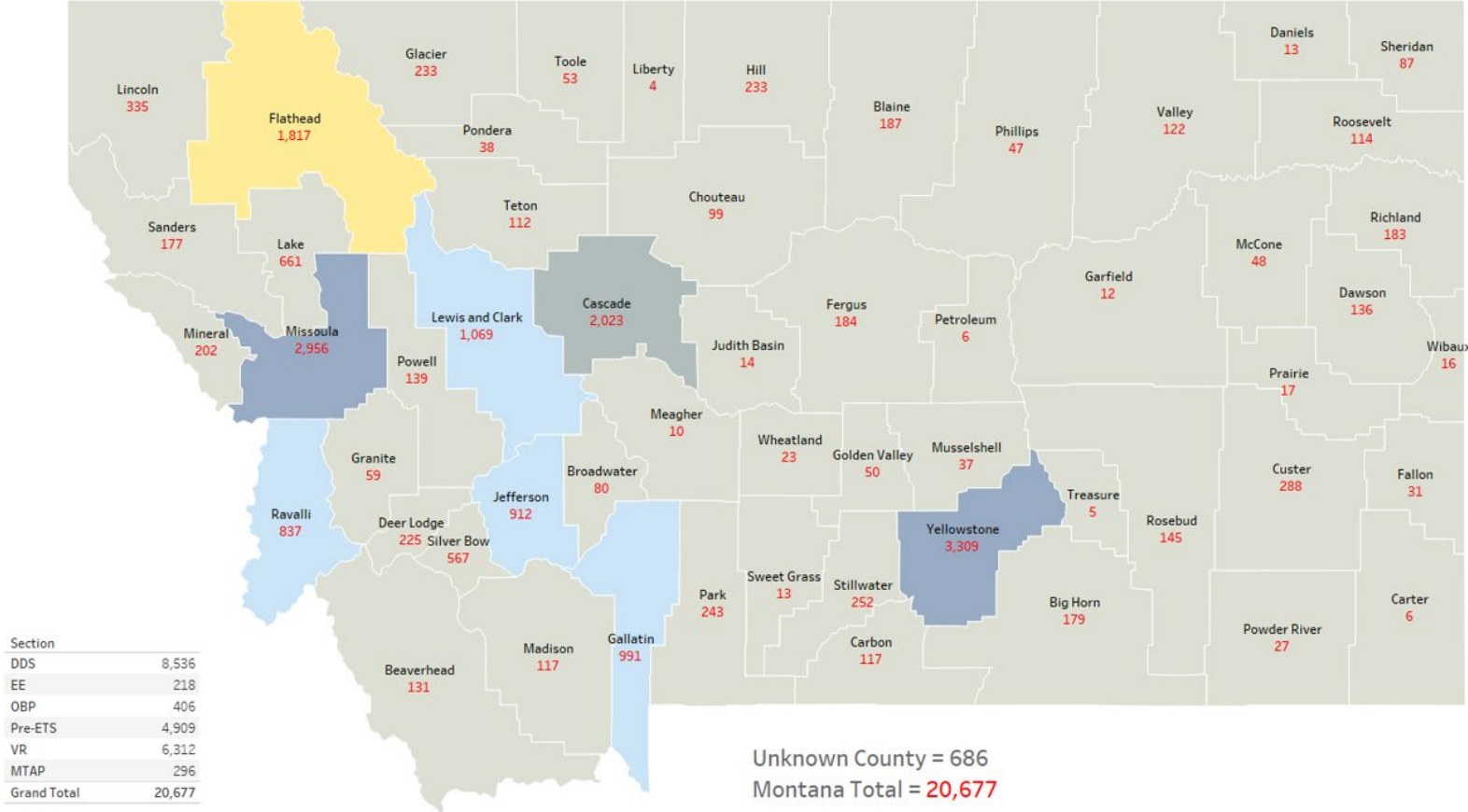
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# Disability Employment & Transitions

Mission: Advancing the independence and employment of Montanans with disabilities.

- The division supports over 20,000 Montanans with disabilities, providing access to services that enhance economic and social well-being.
- We uphold values of informed client choice, independent living, and self-advocacy, ensuring that people with disabilities are fully integrated into society.
- We forge partnerships across The Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS), and with the Montana Department of Labor and Industry (DLI), local school districts, Centers for Independent Living, community rehabilitation providers, and other local vendors across Montana.

# Individuals Served by County



# Summary of Major Functions

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# Vocational Rehabilitation

## Comprehensive Services

- Assists individuals with disabilities in preparing for, obtaining, and advancing in meaningful employment.
- Tailored services align with unique employment goals and individual strengths.

## Collaborative Approach

- VR counselors work closely with job seekers to set employment objectives.
- Identify high-quality services leading to fulfilling careers.
- Guided by the principle of informed choice.

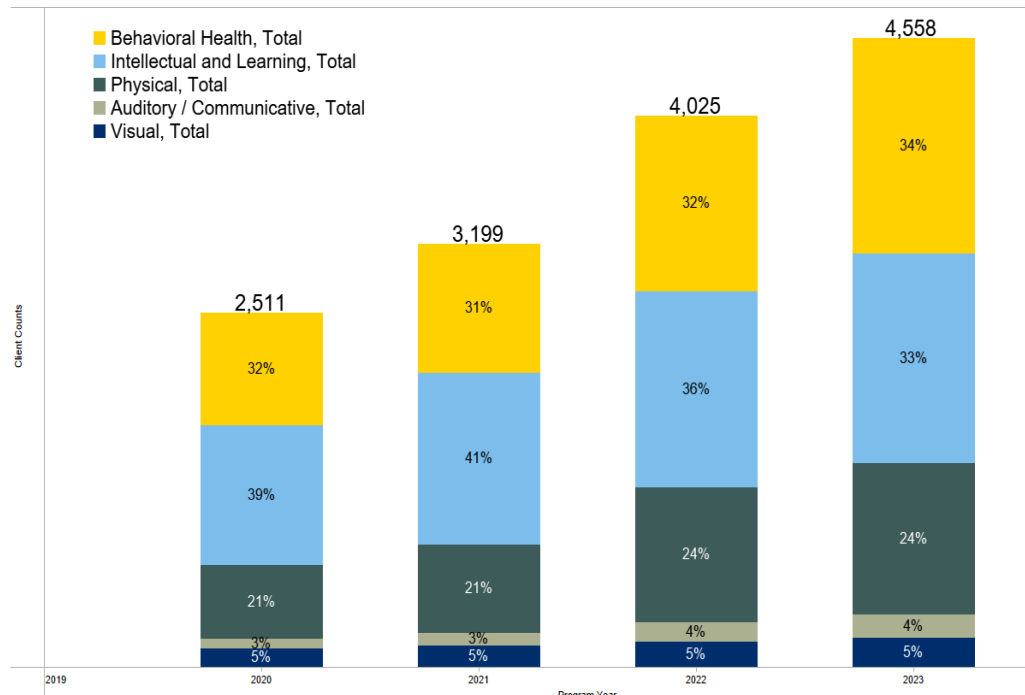
## Integrated Workforce System

- Crucial component of the state's workforce system.
- Services delivered in partnership with local job services, colleges, community rehabilitation providers, and other partners.

Services Provided	
Diagnosis & Treatment	Counseling & Guidance
Job Search	On the Job Supports
Supported Employment	Self-Employment
College Training	On the Job Training
Registered Apprenticeship	Basic Academic or Literacy Training
Transportation	Assistive Technology
Benefits Counseling	Interpreter Services

# Vocational Rehabilitation (cont.)

## VRBS PARTICIPANT CASELOAD BY DISABILITY TYPE



**Mason's Journey**  
Heavy Equipment Mechanic,  
Western States Cat, earning \$21/hour  
and working 40 hrs/wk

# Pre-Employment Transition Services

## Eligibility and Availability

- Available to all school-enrolled students with disabilities in Montana, aged 14-21.

## Services Provided

- Job Exploration Counseling
- Work-Based Learning Experiences
- Counseling on Post-Secondary Programs
- Workplace Readiness Training
- Instruction in Self-Advocacy

2,952 high school students with disabilities received Pre-ETS in 2024

## Goals and Benefits

- Early job exploration and career interest identification.
- Practice and enhancement of workplace readiness skills.
- Exploration of post-secondary training options leading to industry-recognized credentials and meaningful employment.

## Partnerships

- Delivered in partnership with local education agencies, community rehabilitation providers, and independent living centers.



# Extended Employment

- Assists clients with significant disabilities in maintaining employment post-VR program services.
- If Medicaid Waiver funds are not available, Extended Employment is the funding source for long-term job supports.
- Funding for job support transitions smoothly from VR to Extended Employment to prevent service interruptions.
- Ongoing assistance is provided to both individuals and employers.
- Focus on guaranteeing long-term job retention.

In 2023, the unemployment rate for Montanans with disabilities was 4.0%. Over the past few years, this rate has significantly improved, dropping from 10.2% in 2021 to 6.7% in 2022. Moreover, the unemployment rate for Montanans with disabilities is now lower than the U.S. average of 9.3%.

# Blind and Low Vision Services

## The Older Blind Program

### Empowering Independence

- Supports visually impaired or blind individuals aged 55 and older.
- Enhances independent living in homes and communities.

### Services Provided

- Low vision evaluations
- Purchase of adaptive aids
- Daily living skills training
- Orientation and mobility training

## Business Enterprise Program

### Establishment and Purpose

- Established in 1936 under the Randolph-Sheppard Act.
- Creates entrepreneurial pathways for job seekers with visual impairments.

### Statutory Support

- Federal and state statutes grant priority to blind vendors.
- Operate food service facilities in federal and state government buildings.

### Opportunities Offered

- VRBS clients who are legally blind can own and manage food service businesses.
- Includes vending machines, micro markets, coffee shops, and cafes on state and federal properties.

# Disability Determination Services

## Function

- Determines medical eligibility for Montanans applying for Social Security disability benefits.
- Works in cooperation with the Social Security Administration (SSA).

## Evaluation Process

- Claims evaluated by adjudicators and medical/psychological examiners.
- Reviews applicant's medical and work history.
- Ensures federal criteria for disability and blindness are met.

## Benefits Provided

- **Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI):**
  - Pays benefits to individuals and certain family members if the individual is "insured" (having worked long enough and paid Social Security taxes).
- **Supplemental Security Income (SSI):**
  - Pays benefits based on financial need.

# Montana Accessible Communication

*Previously known as Montana Telecommunication Access Program*

Supports Montanans who are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, or have speech or mobility impairments by providing access to traditional telecommunications equipment and services.

## Services Provided

- Montana Relay Program
- Amplified Phones
- Captioned Phones
- Traditional Relay Service
- Relay Friendly Business Program



CapTel, Captioned Telephone, displays easy-to-read captions

# Independent Living Services



Jordan, pumpkin farmer, Vaughn MT

Offers essential services to achieve desired way of life.

## Services Provided

- Advocacy for individual and systemic change
- Peer mentoring
- Benefits counseling and planning
- Assistance with accessibility
- Independent skills training
- Housing information
- Personal care support

# DETD Citizen Councils

DETD includes three citizen councils with Governor appointed members.

- **State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)**-advises VRBS on improving policies, programs, and service delivery.
- **Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)**-develops the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL) and provides policy recommendations to Centers for Independent Living.
- **Committee on Telecommunication Access Services by Persons with Disabilities**-serves as an oversight board for Montana Accessible Communication and Montana Relay

# Highlights and Accomplishments During the 2025 Biennium

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# Foster Care Youth & VRBS Engagement

## Partnership and Impact

- Collaboration between VRBS and CFSD to boost foster care youth participation in VRBS programs by 50%.
- Baseline of 33 foster care youth increased to 69 by end of State Fiscal Year (109% increase).

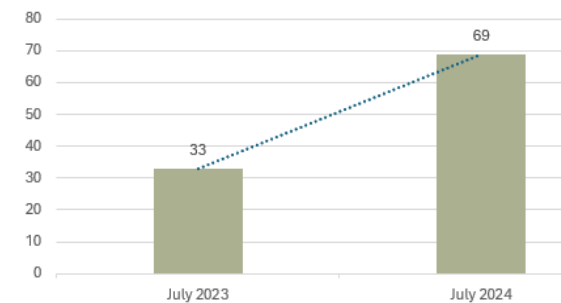
## Benefits

- Enhances community integration, connectivity, and self-reliance for foster care youth.
- Continuous support ensures uninterrupted services during transition to adult workforce.

## Key Actions

- Developed streamlined referral process for foster youth and parents.
- Provided cross-training for DETD and CFSD teams.
- Coordinated services through joint staff meetings.
- Conducted soft skills training for youth in group homes.

### FOSTER CARE YOUTH





# Disability Mentoring Week

National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)–2024 Theme “Access to Good Jobs for All”

## Disability Mentoring Week

- Coordinated by VRBS
- Designated the third week of October
- **Work-Based Learning Experiences (WBLE)**, Activities include:
  - Job shadows
  - Informational interviews
  - Worksite tours
  - Paid work experiences

## Impact

- 174 students with disabilities participated

## Collaboration and Future

- Fostered new relationships with professionals and businesses
- Plans to continue Disability Mentoring Week in coming years



Alex, a student in Libby, job shadows Clayton at Montana Technical Solutions

# Transition Readiness Toolkit

- Montana is one of six states that is beginning to assess the effectiveness of Pre-ETS to students with disabilities through the Rehabilitation Services Administration's grant-funded Human Services Transition Readiness Toolkit.
- The project supports accessible pre and post-test surveys to students to help DPHHS gather and analyze results and impact.
- Benefits of implementation include:
  - increased accuracy in recording Pre-ETS services
  - data-driven decision making
  - individual growth resulting from services
  - program evaluation data on effectiveness of services
  - greater collaboration between transition agencies with shared outcomes and measures

# DDS Intelligent Medical Language Analysis Generation (IMAGEN) Implementation

## Leading the Way

- Among the first to adopt and implement IMAGEN AI machine learning technology.
- Analyzes clinical text from health records, converting it into data for disability determination.

## Implementation and Training

- Beta implementation in early 2023.
- Became instrumental for all examiners through ongoing training.

## Current Usage

- 100% of Montana DDS examiners use IMAGEN.
- Leading the nation in implementation and enthusiasm.

## Benefits

- More efficient analysis of medical evidence.
- Enhanced protection of personally identifiable information (PII).
- More timely and accurate determination of disability cases.

# Individualized Placement & Support Collaboration

## IPS Supported Employment Model Principles

- Goal: Competitive Integrated Employment.
- Eligibility: Open to all individuals with severe mental illness who wish to work.
- Integration: Employment services integrated with mental health treatment teams.
- Informed Choice: Services based on job seeker preferences and choices.
- Benefits Counseling: Clear information on Social Security, Medicaid, and other benefits.
- Timely Job Search: Begins within 30 days of interest expressed.
- Business Relationships: Systematic development of business relationships.
- Continuous Support: Ongoing job supports.

## Collaboration and Goals

- Partnership with the Treatment Bureau and Prevention Bureau in BHDD.
- Enhance provider capacity around the IPS Supported Employment model.

## Initiative and Outcomes

- Evidence-Based: Employment enhances overall health and well-being.
- Formal Memorandum of Understanding: Defines financial obligations, roles, and responsibilities.
- Collaborative framework for coordinated, cost-efficient services.
- Coordination of training efforts and increased provider capacity.

# Funding and PB Information

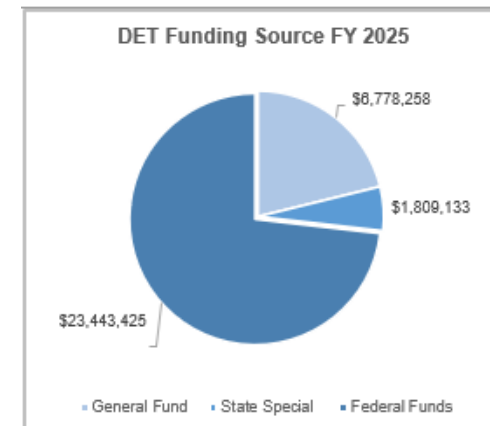
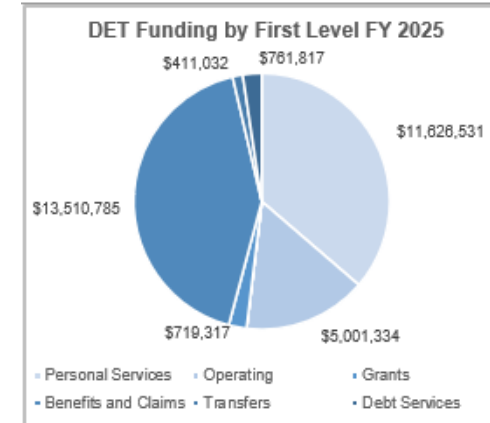
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# Budget Summary

DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT & TRANSITIONS	FY 2025 BUDGET	FY 2026 REQUEST	FY 2027 REQUEST
PB	139.07	147.07	147.07
Personal Services	\$11,626,531	\$11,505,626	\$11,531,894
Operating	\$5,001,334	\$5,366,895	\$5,394,031
Equipment	\$0	\$0	\$0
Local Assistance	\$0	\$0	\$0
Grants	\$719,317	\$218,287	\$218,287
Benefits and Claims	\$13,510,785	\$13,510,785	\$13,510,785
Transfers	\$411,032	\$411,032	\$411,032
Debt Services	\$761,817	\$761,817	\$761,817
<b>TOTAL COSTS</b>	<b>\$32,030,816</b>	<b>\$31,774,442</b>	<b>\$31,827,846</b>
	FY 2025 BUDGET	FY 2026 REQUEST	FY 2027 REQUEST
General Fund	\$6,778,258	\$6,761,817	\$6,760,576
State Special Fund	\$1,809,133	\$2,230,477	\$2,275,628
Federal Fund	\$23,443,425	\$22,782,148	\$22,791,642
<b>TOTAL FUNDS</b>	<b>\$32,030,816</b>	<b>\$31,774,442</b>	<b>\$31,827,846</b>



# Change Packages

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# Change Packages – Present Law (PL) Adjustments

## SWPL 1 – PERSONAL SERVICES

The budget includes reductions of \$750,586 in FY 2026 and \$724,838 in FY 2027 to annualize various personal services costs including FY 2025 statewide pay plan, benefit rate adjustments, longevity adjustments related to incumbents in each position at the time of the snapshot, and vacancy savings.

	General Fund	State Special	Federal Funds	Total Request
<b>FY 2026</b>	(\$185,469)	(\$59,093)	(\$506,024)	(\$750,586)
<b>FY 2027</b>	(\$181,219)	(\$57,042)	(\$486,577)	(\$724,838)
<b>Biennium Total</b>	(\$366,688)	(\$116,135)	(\$992,601)	(\$1,475,424)

## SWPL 3 – INFLATION DEFLATION

This change package includes reductions of \$1,036 in FY 2026 and \$700 in FY 2027 to reflect budgetary changes generated from the application of deflation to state motor pool accounts.

	General Fund	State Special	Federal Funds	Total Request
<b>FY 2026</b>	(\$221)	\$0	(\$815)	(\$1,036)
<b>FY 2027</b>	(\$149)	\$0	(\$551)	(\$700)
<b>Biennium Total</b>	(\$370)	\$0	(\$1,366)	(\$1,736)



# Change Packages – PL Continued

## PL 1003 - DECREASING APPROP FOR MONTECH PROGRAM - DETD

This present law adjustment removes the appropriation for the MonTECH Program in DETD. Historically, funding for the program passed through DETD, with the University of Montana as the ultimate recipient. The funding stream has changed, and the University of Montana receives funding directly from its federal partner, leaving excess federal appropriation in the DPHHS budget. This package requests a reduction of \$501,030 in federal funds in each year of the biennium.

	General Fund	State Special	Federal Funds	Total Request
<b>FY 2026</b>	\$0	\$0	(\$501,030)	(\$501,030)
<b>FY 2027</b>	\$0	\$0	(\$501,030)	(\$501,030)
<b>Biennium Total</b>	\$0	\$0	(\$1,002,060)	(\$1,002,060)

# Change Packages – New Proposals (NP) Adjustments

## NP 1001 - MTAP APPROPRIATION INCREASE FOR EXPANDED SERVICES – DETD

This new proposal is necessary to increase appropriation and expand services for the MTAP in the DETD. This service will provide equal access to communication for all Montanans with communication challenges in an evolving world of technology advancement, increased population in Montana, and rises in equipment and contractor fees. This service is funded with state special revenue through assessment of a 10-cent fee collected monthly from users of landlines and cell phones. This package requests \$1,003,974 in state special revenue funds for the biennium.

	General Fund	State Special	Federal Funds	Total Request
FY 2026	\$0	\$480,437	\$0	\$480,437
FY 2027	\$0	\$523,537	\$0	\$523,537
Biennium Total	\$0	\$1,003,974	\$0	\$1,003,974

# Change Packages – NP Continued

## NP 1004 - VOCATIONAL REHAB FOR CLIENTS WITH SDMI OR CO-OCCURRING ILLNESSES - DET

This new proposal is necessary to add four PB for rehabilitation counselors to the budget for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program in the DETD. The increase is needed to provide and coordinate Individualized Placement and Support (IPS) services for clients who live with a Serious and Disabling Mental Illness (SDMI) or co-occurring diagnosis. The funding source for this position is 78.7% federal funds and 21.3% general fund. This package requests \$694,249 in total funds for the biennium, including \$147,874 in general fund and \$546,375 of federal funds.

	General Fund	State Special	Federal Funds	Total Request
<b>FY 2026</b>	\$75,042	\$0	\$277,274	\$352,316
<b>FY 2027</b>	\$72,832	\$0	\$269,101	\$341,933
<b>Biennium Total</b>	\$147,874	\$0	\$546,375	\$694,249

# Change Packages – NP Continued

## NP 1005 - VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELOR AT MT STATE HOSPITAL – DETD

This new proposal adds 1.00 PB for a rehabilitation counselor to the budget for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program in the DETD. The increase is necessary to provide employment and training services to patients who are residing at or discharging from the Montana State Hospital to increase their self-sufficiency and independence. The funding source for this position is 78.7% federal funds and 21.3% general fund. This package requests \$173,561 in total funds for the biennium, including \$36,969 in the general fund and \$136,592 of federal funds.

	General Fund	State Special	Federal Funds	Total Request
<b>FY 2026</b>	\$18,761	\$0	\$69,318	\$88,079
<b>FY 2027</b>	\$18,208	\$0	\$67,274	\$85,482
<b>Biennium Total</b>	\$36,969	\$0	\$136,592	\$173,561

# Change Packages – NP Continued

## NP 1007 - INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS PROGRAM FOR BLIND/LOW VISION – HOMEMAKER

This new proposal adds 1.0 PB for the DETD. The PB will distribute, and provide training on usage of, equipment assistive technology for individuals adjusting to blindness and vision loss that are not seeking employment. Due to eligibility requirements, these services are currently only available to individuals wishing to maintain, retain, or advance in employment, or those aged 55 and older. This new proposal would provide services to individuals managing the onset of blindness or low vision who do not fit into the other categories. This package requests \$148,092 in general funds for the biennium. This change package is contingent on passage and approval of LCXXX.

	General Fund	State Special	Federal Funds	Total Request
<b>FY 2026</b>	\$75,446	\$0	\$0	\$75,446
<b>FY 2027</b>	\$72,646	\$0	\$0	\$72,646
<b>Biennium Total</b>	\$148,092	\$0	\$0	\$148,092

# Conclusion



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