

## Gus Calls for Full Literacy Program Funding for the Blind

Gus has signed on to a letter to House Appropriators calling on Congress to fully fund the National Library Service (NLS) program's audio book transition from analog to digital technology.

Roll Call has posted a story highlighting the challenges currently facing NLS's transition from analog to digital audio...

For 10 years, the Library's National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped has been working on a plan to modernize the system. Officials decided on custom-made flash-drive players with cartridges, to be built and implemented with the help of \$76 million over four years. Fiscal 2008 was to be the first year.

But instead of the \$19.1 million needed for a four-year track, the program received \$12.5 million. At that level, the transition will take six years, and there will be fewer books.

And now it looks like the Library has accepted the longer track: For fiscal 2009, Librarian of Congress James Billington is asking Congress for only \$12.5 million, said NLS Director Frank Kurt Cylke. Cylke had requested enough to put the program back on a four-year track.

Those two extra years, advocates say, are too long for people whose only options for reading are rapidly deteriorating cassettes and cassette players. [Read more...](#)

Gus and his colleagues are requesting that this year's request to fund the analog to digital conversion be fully met, and that the funds cut from last year's request also be included to ensure that the project remains "on course for a successful conversion."

The following is an excerpt from the letter arguing for funding to get the NLS digital conversion back on track...

"All of you know that literacy is essential to success and that it cannot be achieved without access to the printed word. We are writing to you because blind and visually impaired people in the United States are facing a literacy crisis, and

those of us who serve in the United States Congress can act to stop this crisis from occurring. For this reason, we strongly encourage you to join us in a letter to Chairman Wasserman-Schultz and Ranking Member Latham of Subcommittee on Legislative Branch of the House Appropriations Committee, to fully fund the National Library Service program to transition audio books from analog to digital technology. This critical funding will insure continued access to literary materials for the blind and visually impaired who rely on this technology to be able to read.

"Americans who can read print have virtually limitless access to books, magazines, newspapers, and other reading material. For the blind, the primary source of reading matter is the Books for the Blind Program through National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped of the Library of Congress (NLS). Almost no magazines are available to the blind except through the Library of Congress. They can get a few recorded books from bookstores, but they are often abridged readings of very few popular titles. The collection of recorded books produced by the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped is much broader, and all of its titles are unabridged. The NLS Talking Book Program distributes books in recorded form to hundreds of thousands of blind Americans, but this crucial service is in jeopardy."

This post has been updated