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110TH CONGRESS
1st Session

SENATE

REPORT
110–138

TRAINING FOR REAL-TIME WRITERS ACT OF 2007

R E P O R T

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

ON

S. 675



JULY 31, 2007.—Ordered to be printed

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SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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Mr. INOUYE, from the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany S. 675]

The Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, to which was referred the bill (S. 675) to provide competitive grants for training court reporters and closed captioners to meet requirements for realtime writers under the Telecommunications Act of 1996, and for other purposes, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon with amendments and recommends that the bill (as amended) do pass.

PURPOSE OF THE BILL

The primary objective of this legislation is to allow funding to be made available for the purpose of training real-time writers qualified to provide captioning services.

BACKGROUND AND NEEDS

There are over 30 million deaf or hard-of-hearing Americans who rely on closed captioning to get news and other vital information. Closed captioning also opens the world to the deaf and hard-of-hearing by allowing them to interact and participate in civic and personal events. Further, millions of Americans benefit from closed captioning, including remedial readers, young children learning to read, and individuals learning English as a second language. When Congress passed the Telecommunications Act of 1996, it required that all video programming distributors provide captioning for 100 percent of non-exempt English language programming by 2006 and Spanish language programming by 2010. In order to ensure that this requirement is met for the over 1,700 broadcast stations and

hundreds of cable and satellite channels, the National Court Reporters Association estimates that thousands of additional captioners will be needed. This legislation would assist in fulfilling this Congressional requirement.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

The Senate passed this legislation in the 107th Congress as an amendment to the CAN–SPAM Act of 2003, but was dropped in conference. Similar measures were also approved by unanimous consent by the Senate in both the 108th and 109th Congresses.

On February 16, 2007, Senator Harkin introduced S. 675, "The Training for Realtime Writers Act of 2007." The bill has 15 cosponsors.

On April 25, 2007, the Committee held an Executive Session at which S. 675 was considered. The bill was approved unanimously by voice vote and was ordered reported with one amendment offered by the Chairman to make technical corrections.

ESTIMATED COSTS

In accordance with paragraph 11(a) of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate and section 403 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, the Committee provides the following cost estimate, prepared by the Congressional Budget Office:

S. 675—Training for Realtime Writers Act of 2007

Summary: CBO estimates that implementing S. 675 would cost $69 million over the next five years, assuming appropriation of the authorized amounts. Funds would be used by the Department of Commerce to provide grants to eligible entities to increase the number of realtime writers available to provide closed-captioning services for video programming. The grants would be used by court-reporting programs for both training and job-placement assistance.

Enacting this bill would not affect direct spending or revenues. S. 675 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act (UMRA); the bill could benefit public institutions of higher education.

Estimated cost to the Federal Government: The estimated budgetary impact of S. 675 is shown in the following table. For this estimate, CBO assumes that $20 million authorized to be appropriated for each of fiscal years 2008 through 2012 will be appropriated for each year and that outlays will follow historical trends for similar programs. The costs of this legislation fall within budget function 370 (commerce and housing credit).

	By fiscal year, in millions of dollars—				
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
CHANGES IN SPENDING SUBJECT TO APPROPRIATION					
Authorization level	20	20	20	20	20
Estimated outlays	2	11	16	20	20

Intergovernmental and private-sector impact: S. 675 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in UMRA. The bill would authorize grant funds that could benefit public insti-

tutions of higher education. Any costs they might incur would result from complying with conditions of federal assistance.

Estimate prepared by: Federal Costs: Susan Willie; Impact on State, Local, and Tribal Governments: Elizabeth Cove; Impact on the Private Sector: Craig Cammarata.

Estimate approved by: Peter H. Fontaine, Deputy Assistant Director for Budget Analysis.

REGULATORY IMPACT STATEMENT

In accordance with paragraph 11(b) of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee provides the following evaluation of the regulatory impact of the legislation, as reported:

NUMBER OF PERSONS COVERED

The legislation would provide an authorization of appropriations for the fiscal years 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012 to enable the Secretary of Commerce to provide grants to fund educational programs to train real-time writers. This bill would affect all individuals who use closed-captioning services, including more than 30 million who are deaf or hard of hearing.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Section 7 of this bill would authorize appropriations of $20 million dollars for fiscal years 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012.

PRIVACY

This legislation would not have any adverse impact on the personal privacy of the individuals affected.

PAPERWORK

S. 675 would require each eligible entity receiving grants to submit to the Secretary of Commerce a report describing the use of grant amounts and the effectiveness of activities aimed at increasing the number of real-time writers. The bill would also require a final report by each entity receiving grants on best practices for increasing the number of individuals who are trained, employed, and retained in employment as real-time writers.

SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

Section 1: Short title

Section 1 states the short title of the legislation, the "Training for Realtime Writers Act of 2007".

Section 2: Findings

Section 2 creates Congressional findings on the need for closed-captioning services. The findings detail the history of the Federal Communications Commission's rules requiring closed captioning and accompanying studies which demonstrate the benefits received from closed captioning services.

Section 3: Authorization of grant program to promote training and job placement of realtime writers

Section 3 would authorize the Secretary of Commerce to provide grants to accredited educational institutions. Grants would be for a period of two years and would not exceed $1.5 million.

Section 4: Application

Section 4 would establish criteria for grants submitted to the Department of Commerce and an application process.

Section 5: Use of funds

Section 5 would set forth the requirements for the use of funds for entities receiving grants. Grants would be used for recruitment, training and assistance, and job placement for individuals who have completed a court reporting training program. Section 5 would impose a 5 percent cap on the amount of grant funds that the Secretary of Commerce could spend on administrative costs.

Section 6: Reports

Section 6 would require each entity receiving a grant to provide a report to the Secretary of Commerce at the end of each year of the grant period and would require an annual review be conducted by the Inspector General of the Department of Commerce.

Section 7: Authorization of appropriations

Section 7 would authorize $20 million for each of fiscal years 2008 through 2012.

Section 8: Sunset

Section 8 would provide a definitive date for the end of the program, corresponding to the last day of the fifth fiscal year in which funds are to be appropriated.

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW

In compliance with paragraph 12 of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee states that the bill as reported would make no change to existing law.

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