

Shortchanging the blind

by the St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Late last year, a federal judge ordered the U.S. Treasury Department to redesign the nation's paper currency to accommodate the blind. A redesign makes perfect sense, but the government doesn't see it that way.

Four years ago, the American Council of the Blind filed a lawsuit arguing that American currency was "inaccessible" to blind people and violated a law prohibiting discrimination in government programs against people with disabilities. Judge James Robertson of the U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., ruled in late November that the government was discriminating against blind people by producing bills of the same size that can't be distinguished by touch. The judge ordered the Treasury Department to start working within 30 days on possible solutions such as printing bills with foil, raised numerals, perforated dots or denominations in varying sizes. The government appealed last month.

Of the more than 180 countries that issue paper money, only the United States prints its bills in identical sizes and colors for all denominations.

It's something most of us never think about, but stop and consider: Paper money is a huge part of everyday life. Imagine shopping, buying lunch, paying a bill or taking a cab without being able to identify the denomination of bills. You wouldn't know a \$1 bill from a \$10 bill - or, for that matter, a Benjamin.

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