



Submitted Testimony for House Oversight and Government Reform
Committee Hearing on

*Wasting Information Technology Dollars: How Can the Federal
Government Reform its IT Investment Strategy?*

Tuesday, January 22, 2013

On behalf of the Consortium of Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) Telecommunications and Technology Task Force we thank you for holding this hearing today, and appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony.

CCD is a coalition of national disability organizations working together to advocate for national public policy that ensures the self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society. Since 1973, the CCD has advocated on behalf of people of all ages with all types of disabilities. CCD has worked to achieve federal legislation and regulations that assure that the 54 million children and adults with disabilities are fully integrated into the mainstream of society. The Telecommunications and Technology Task Force focuses on ensuring national policy on matters of telecommunications and technology, including assistive technology, helps move society toward our ultimate goal of full inclusion of all people with a disability.

People with disabilities can, and do, work in all areas of American society, including the federal workforce. They thrive when they fully participate, and in turn, the nation thrives. President Obama recognized the importance of the federal government in employment of people with disabilities when he issued Executive Order 13548 which stated, "As the Nation's largest employer, the Federal Government must become a model for the employment of individuals with disabilities."

Every day, accessible information technology systems (both hardware and software) allow people with a disability to be included in all aspects of federal employment. However, the key there is that the systems are accessible. If the systems fail to live up to the accessibility standards of Section 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, then the technology is not helpful for the person with a disability to fulfill their job requirements.

Unfortunately, even with Executive Order 13548, the federal government has not lived up to being “a model for the employment of individuals with disabilities.”

A September 2012 report from the Department of Justice on the accessibility of federal government electronic and information technology found that while a significant amount of information technology is accessible for people with disabilities, there is still much progress that could be made to ensure accessibility. In fact at times, “...accessibility has often been an afterthought. Modifying existing technology to make it accessible is much more difficult and much more expensive than designing technology in an accessible manner in the first place.”

This is often a critical, but often overlooked point: to ensure the full benefits, in a cost effective manner, of accessible technology it is better to make the technology accessible at its introduction through universal design. Introducing technology and then making it accessible at a later time is a highly ineffective and cost inefficient way to produce something accessible. As one of the largest purchasers of information technology systems in the United States, and to follow through with being “a model for the employment of individuals with disabilities,” the federal government needs to ensure that accessibility through universal design is included at the beginning when considering products to purchase, not after they have already been purchased. Doing so will ensure that the federal dollars spent on information technology systems is not spent inefficiently.

The CCD Telecommunications and Technology Task Force calls on the federal government and private entities to work with the disability community in the beginning, at the development stage, to ensure that the new technology is fully accessible to all. This will be a much more efficient way of doing business, and we as members of the task force stand ready to help.

A civil right without enforcement is just words on paper. That is why it is extremely important that the civil right to accessible technology be strongly enforced by the Department of Justice and other agencies within the federal government. First, we encourage the Department of Justice to continue, and even strengthen and be more consistent in, its work being done on enforcing laws requiring accessible technology. The Department should look to members of CCD, especially the Telecommunications and Technology Task Force, to help expose situations where civil rights to accessible technology are being violated as well as ways to address these violations. In addition, the Department needs to move forward with their web access regulations for the Americans with Disabilities Act as they would help ensure that people with disabilities have full access to the web to find employment, as well as use the resources on the web to fulfill their job duties. Finally, clear AND final regulations will go a long way to encouraging the use and production of accessible technology which will benefit people with disabilities, and all society.

Technology and its capacity to be used to create and expand employment opportunities for people with a disability, as well as deliver accessible and universally designed

materials is continually evolving. The federal government should be at the forefront of this movement through an efficient use of its information technology funding to purchase accessible information technology. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony, and stand ready to work with you and others in Congress, the Administration, and the private and public sector to ensure accessible technology is the first thought, and not an afterthought.