



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS, REGION IV

61 FORSYTH ST., SOUTHWEST, SUITE 19T10
ATLANTA, GA 30303-8927

REGION IV
ALABAMA
FLORIDA
GEORGIA
TENNESSEE

June 2, 2017

Donna Storter Long, Chair
Heartland Library Cooperative
319 W. Center Ave.
Sebring, Florida 33870

Re: OCR No. 04-16-4031

Dear Ms. Long:

This letter is to inform you of the disposition of the above-referenced complaint filed against Heartland Library Cooperative (Cooperative) with the U.S. Department of Education (Department), Office for Civil Rights (OCR), on September 21, 2016, alleging discrimination on the basis of disability. Specifically, the complaint alleged that the Cooperative's website is not accessible to students and adults with disabilities including, but not limited to, individuals with vision impairments.

OCR is responsible for enforcing Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended (Title II), 42 U.S.C. § 12131 *et seq.*, and its implementing regulations at 28 C.F.R. Part 35, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability in programs, services and activities of public entities. As a public entity, the Cooperative is subject to Title II.

This letter summarizes the applicable legal standards, the information gathered during the investigation, and how the investigation was resolved.

Legal Authority:

Title II prohibits people, on the basis of disability, from being excluded from participation in, being denied the benefits of, or otherwise being subjected to discrimination by recipients of federal financial assistance or by public entities. 28 C.F.R. § 35.130. People with disabilities must have equal access to recipients' programs, services, or activities unless doing so would fundamentally alter the nature of the programs, services, or activities, or would impose an undue burden. 28 C.F.R. § 35.164. Title II prohibits affording individuals with disabilities an opportunity to participate in or benefit from aids, benefits, and services that is unequal to the opportunity afforded others. 28 C.F.R. § 35.130(b)(1)(ii). Similarly, individuals with disabilities must be provided with aids, benefits, or services that provide an equal opportunity to achieve the same result or the same level of achievement as others. 28 C.F.R. § 35.130(b)(1)(iii). An individual with a disability, or a class of individuals with disabilities, may be provided with a different or separate aid, benefit, or service only if doing so is necessary to ensure that the aid,

benefit, or service is as effective as that provided to others. 28 C.F.R. § 35.130(b)(1)(iv). Title II also requires public entities to take steps to ensure that communications with people with disabilities are as effective as communications with others, subject to the fundamental alteration and undue burden defenses. 28 C.F.R. § 35.160(a)(1). In sum, programs, services, and activities—whether in a “brick and mortar,” on-line, or other “virtual” context—must be operated in ways that comply with Title II.

Investigation to Date:

OCR examined the pages of the Cooperative’s website identified by the Complainant to determine whether they are accessible to persons with disabilities. These pages included:

- Home page: www.myhlc.org

OCR evaluated the above-listed page and determined there are some technological barriers to access for people with disabilities. These barriers can impede persons with disabilities access to the Cooperative’s online programs, services and activities, and can interfere with the Cooperative’s ability to communicate effectively with persons with disabilities.

Before OCR conducted additional investigation of the Cooperative’s website, the Cooperative expressed an interest in voluntarily resolving this case. In light of the Cooperative’s willingness to address its website comprehensively without further investigation, OCR determined that entering into a voluntary resolution agreement is appropriate.

Resolution Agreement:

The Cooperative submitted a signed resolution agreement (Agreement) to OCR on May 31, 2017. When fully implemented, the Agreement will address the barriers noted above as well as resolve issues of accessibility pertaining to the rest of the Cooperative’s website. The Cooperative committed to take actions including:

- selecting an auditor who has the requisite knowledge and experience to identify barriers to access on the Cooperative’s website and conducting a thorough audit of existing online content and functionality;
- making all new website content and functionality accessible to people with disabilities;
- developing a corrective action plan to prioritize the removal of online barriers over an 18-month period;
- posting a notice to persons with disabilities about how to request access to online information or functionality that is currently inaccessible; and
- providing website accessibility training to all appropriate personnel.

OCR will monitor the Cooperative's implementation of the Agreement. When OCR concludes the Cooperative has fully and effectively implemented the terms and obligations of the Agreement and is in compliance with the statutes and regulations at issue in the case, OCR will terminate its monitoring and close the case. If the Cooperative fails to implement the Agreement, OCR may initiate administrative enforcement or judicial proceedings to enforce the specific terms and obligations of the Agreement. Before initiating administrative enforcement (34 C.F.R. §§ 100.9, 100.10), or judicial proceedings to enforce the Agreement, OCR shall give the Cooperative written notice of the alleged breach and sixty (60) calendar days to cure the alleged breach.

This concludes OCR's investigation of the complaint and should not be interpreted to address the Cooperative's compliance with any other regulatory provision or to address any issues other than those addressed in this letter.

This letter sets forth OCR's determination in an individual OCR case. This letter is not a formal statement of OCR policy and should not be relied upon, cited, or construed as such. OCR's formal policy statements are approved by a duly authorized OCR official and made available to the public. The Complainant may file a private suit in federal court, whether or not OCR finds a violation.

Please be advised that the Cooperative may not harass, coerce, intimidate, or discriminate against any individual because he or she has filed a complaint or participated in the complaint resolution process. If this happens, the harmed individual may file a complaint alleging such treatment.

Under the Freedom of Information Act, it may be necessary to release this letter and related correspondence and records upon request. In the event that OCR receives such a request, it will seek to protect, to the extent provided by law, personally identifiable information, which, if released, could reasonably be expected to constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy.

OCR looks forward to receiving the Cooperative's first monitoring report by **August 1, 2017**. For questions about implementation of the Agreement, please contact Kristen Williams, who will be monitoring the Cooperative's implementation, by e-mail at kristen.williams@ed.gov, or by telephone at (404) 974-9272. For questions about this letter, please contact me, at (404) 974-9356.

Sincerely,

Wendy Gatlin
Compliance Team Leader

Enclosure
cc: Highland Library Cooperative Coordinator