



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS**

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**REGION V**  
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February 13, 2017

Brian Bannon  
Commissioner  
Chicago Public Library  
400 S. State Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60605

Re: OCR Docket #05-16-4048  
Chicago Public Library

Dear Mr. Bannon:

This is to advise you of the resolution of the above-referenced complaint investigation of the Chicago Public Library (the Library) by the U. S. Department of Education (Department), Office for Civil Rights (OCR). The complaint, which was received on July 18, 2016, alleged that the Library is discriminating on the basis of disability.

Specifically, the Complainant alleged that certain of the Library's web pages are not accessible to students and adults with disabilities. These include the Library's:

- Homepage;
- Services FAQs;
- Online Resources FAQs;
- Library Card FAQs;
- eBooks and eAudiobooks Support;
- Polish; and
- Chinese pages.

OCR is responsible for enforcing Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Title II), 42 U.S.C. § 12131-12134, and its implementing regulations at 28 C.F.R. Part 35, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability in programs, services, and activities by public entities. Under Title II, OCR has jurisdiction over complaints alleging discrimination on the basis of disability that are filed against certain public entities, including public libraries. As a public entity over which OCR has jurisdiction, the Library is subject to Title II and its implementing regulation.

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

The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

### **Legal Authority**

Title II provides that no qualified persons with disabilities shall, on the basis of disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination by recipients of federal financial assistance or by public entities.<sup>1</sup> Persons with disabilities must have equal access to the programs, services, or activities unless doing so would fundamentally alter the nature of the programs, services, or activities, or would impose an undue burden.<sup>2</sup> Under Title II, individuals with disabilities must be afforded an opportunity that is equal to the opportunity afforded others to participate in or benefit from aids, benefits, and services<sup>3</sup> and must be provided with aids, benefits, or services that provide an equal opportunity as others to achieve the same result or the same level of achievement.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.

Public entities must ensure equal access to the educational benefits and opportunities afforded by technology and equal treatment in the use of the technology for all individuals with disabilities who access their programs or activities, including members of the public.

### **Investigation To Date**

During the course of the investigation, OCR examined a number of the Library’s webpages to determine whether they are accessible to persons with disabilities, including the Library’s homepage, services FAQs, Online Resources FAQs, Library Card FAQs, eBooks and eAudiobooks Support, Polish and Chinese pages.

OCR conducted a preliminary evaluation of the above-listed pages and had concerns with the accessibility of certain features to persons with disabilities, including visually impaired persons (blind and low vision), mobility impaired persons, and hearing impaired persons.

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<sup>1</sup> 28 C.F.R. § 35.130

<sup>2</sup> 28 C.F.R. § 35.164

<sup>3</sup> 28 C.F.R. § 35.130(b)(1)(ii)

<sup>4</sup> 28 C.F.R. § 35.130(b)(1)(iii)

<sup>5</sup> 28 C.F.R. § 35.130(b)(1)(iv)

<sup>6</sup> 28 C.F.R. § 35.160(a)(1)

These concerns include that images were missing “form labels,” text labels for persons who use a screen reader, and certain items had low contrast, which may render the item unreadable for persons with low vision. These barriers may deny persons with disabilities access to programs, services, and activities offered on the website and may impede the Library’s communications with persons with disabilities.

Prior to the conclusion of OCR’s investigation, the Library expressed an interest in voluntarily resolving this case. In order to conclude OCR’s investigation of this complaint, OCR would have had to conduct interviews, review documents, and examine a broader range of pages on the Library’s website. In light of the Library’s willingness to address its website comprehensively without further investigation, OCR determined entering into a voluntary resolution agreement would be appropriate.

### **Resolution Agreement**

The Library submitted a signed resolution agreement (Agreement) to OCR on February 10, 2017. The Library committed to take actions such as:

- Selecting an auditor who has the requisite knowledge and experience to identify barriers to access on the Library’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;
- 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.

This concludes OCR’s investigation of the complaint. These findings should not be interpreted to address the Library’s compliance with any other regulatory provision or to address any issues other than those addressed in this letter. OCR will monitor the Library’s implementation of the Agreement. When OCR concludes the Library has fully implemented the terms 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 Library fails to implement the Agreement, OCR may seek compliance with the federal civil rights laws through any means authorized by law, including the enforcement of the terms of the enclosed Agreement.

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.

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OCR's formal policy statements are approved by a duly authorized OCR official and made available to the public. The complainant may have the right to file a private suit in federal court whether or not OCR finds a violation.

Please be advised that the Library may not harass, coerce, intimidate, discriminate or otherwise retaliate against any individual because he or she asserted a right or privilege under a law enforced by OCR or filed a complaint, testified, or participated in the complaint resolution process. If this happens, the individual may file a retaliation complaint with OCR.

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

Thank you for the assistance the Library extended to OCR in resolving this complaint. In particular, we wish to thank MX. XXXXX XXXXX, MX. XXXXX XXXXX and MX. XXXXX XXXXX, counsels for the Library. If you have any questions, please contact Daniel Kim, Attorney, at (312) 730-1482 or by email at [Daniel.Kim@ed.gov](mailto:Daniel.Kim@ed.gov).

Sincerely,

Ann Cook-Graver  
Supervisory Attorney

cc: Ms. XXXXX XXXXX  
Ms. XXXXX XXXXX  
Ms. XXXXX XXXXX

Enclosure