



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office for Civil Rights

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DENVER, COLORADO 80204-3582

REGION VIII

ARIZONA
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October 26, 2016

Carol Hilty, Superintendent
Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind
33 N. Institute Street
Colorado Springs CO 80903

Re: OCR No. 08-16-1368
Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind

Dear Superintendent:

This is to advise you of the resolution of the above-referenced complaint investigation of the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind (the recipient) by the United States Department of Education (Department), Office for Civil Rights (OCR). The complaint, which was received on June 15, 2016, alleged that the recipient was discriminating, on the basis of disability, because certain pages on its website are not accessible to persons with disabilities.

OCR is responsible for enforcing section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (Section 504), 29 United States Code (U.S.C.) § 794, *et seq.*, and its implementing regulations at 34 Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) Part 104, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability in programs and activities of recipients of federal financial assistance. OCR also 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 recipient of federal financial assistance from the Department and as a public entity, the recipient is subject to OCR's jurisdiction under Section 504 and Title II.

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

Legal Authority:

Section 504 and Title II prohibit 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. 34 C.F.R. § 104.4 and 28 C.F.R.

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

§ 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. Both Section 504 and Title II prohibit affording individuals with disabilities an opportunity to participate in or benefit from aids, benefits, and services that is unequal to the opportunity afforded others. 34 C.F.R. § 104.4(b)(1)(ii); 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. 34 C.F.R. § 104.4(b)(2); 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. 34 C.F.R. § 104.4(b)(1)(iv); 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 Section 504 and Title II.

Investigation To Date:

During the course of the investigation OCR examined a number of pages on the recipient's website to determine whether they are accessible to persons with disabilities. These web pages included:

- Homepage- <http://www.csdb.org>
- Programs and Services- <http://www.csdb.org/programs-services/>
- School for the Blind- <http://www.csdb.org/programs-services/school-blind-2/>
- School for the Deaf- <http://www.csdb.org/programs-services/school-deaf/>
- Public Event Calendar--<http://www.csdb.org/events/>
- Parents- <http://www.csdb.org/parent-information-page-2/>

OCR evaluated the above-listed pages and determined that there were barriers to access for persons with disabilities in that some important content of the website could only be accessed by people who can use a computer mouse, which mean that content was not available to those who are blind, many of who have low vision, and those disabilities affecting fine motor control; some links were not meaningfully labeled; and some forms were not properly labeled.

Prior to the conclusion of OCR's investigation, the recipient 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 recipient's website; OCR would have sought to learn, for example, whether the recipient had received previous complaints of inaccessible website content or functionality, and how those complaints were resolved; and whether its information technology staff members and people

responsible for uploading content or maintaining web pages had received training in website accessibility. In light of the recipient's willingness to address its website comprehensively without further investigation, OCR determined entering into a voluntary resolution agreement would be appropriate.

Resolution Agreement:

The recipient submitted a signed resolution agreement (Agreement) to OCR on October 24, 2016. The recipient committed to take actions such as:

- Selecting an auditor who has the requisite knowledge and experience to identify barriers to access on the recipient'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.

This concludes OCR's investigation of the complaint. These findings should not be interpreted to address the recipient's compliance with any other regulatory provision or to address any issues other than those addressed in this letter. OCR will monitor the recipient's implementation of the Agreement. When OCR concludes the recipient 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 recipient fails to implement the Agreement, OCR may seek compliance with the federal civil rights laws through any means authorized by law, including to enforce the specific terms of the 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. 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 recipient 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 your assistance and that of Assistant Attorney General Sally Roller. We look forward to receiving your first monitoring report within 30 days of the effective date of the Agreement. If you have any questions, please contact me at Mary.Lou.Mobley@ed.gov or 303-844-4480.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Lou Mobley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary Lou Mobley, Esq.
National Disability Expert

cc: Assistant Attorney General Sally Roller (by email only)