



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

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SEATTLE, WA 98174-1099

December 1, 2016

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Via U.S. Mail

Ms. Tracy Kahlo
Executive Director
PAVE (Partnerships for Action, Voices for Empowerment)
6316 South 12th Street
Tacoma, Washington 98465

Re: PAVE (Partnerships for Action, Voices for Empowerment)
OCR Reference No. 10164029

Dear Ms. Kahlo:

This is to advise you of the resolution of the above-referenced complaint investigation of PAVE (Partnerships for Action, Voices for Empowerment) by the United States Department of Education (Department), Office for Civil Rights (OCR). The complaint, which OCR received on July 6, 2016, alleged that PAVE is 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 (Section 504), as amended, 29 U.S.C. §794, et seq., and its implementing regulations at 34 C.F.R. Part 104, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability in programs and activities of recipients of federal financial assistance. As a recipient of federal financial assistance from this Department, PAVE is subject to OCR's jurisdiction under Section 504.

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

Section 504 prohibits recipients of federal financial assistance from, on the basis of disability, denying qualified disabled persons an equal opportunity to participate in or benefit from aids, benefits, or services that are delivered either directly or through contractual, licensing, or other arrangements. 34 C.F.R. §104.4. People with disabilities must have equal access to the 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. 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). 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). 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.

Investigation to Date

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

- Homepage at www.wapave.org;
- Parent training and information web page at www.wapave.org/programs/parent-training-and-information;
- History web page at www.wapave.org/about-us/history;
- Advocacy and education links and resources web page at www.wapave.org/programs/parent-training-and-information/advocacy-education-links;
- Pipeline articles web page at www.wapave.org/pipeline;
- Links web page at www.wapave.org/resources/links;
- Website feedback web page at www.wapave.org/contact-us/website-feedback;
- Stomp services web page at www.wapave.org/programs/specialized-training-military-parents-stomp/stomp-services; and
- Links for Military Families web page at www.wapave.org/programs/specialized-training-military-parents-stomp/links-military-families.

OCR evaluated the above-listed web pages and determined that important images were missing text descriptions, called “alt tags,” that describe the images to blind and low-vision users who use special software; some important content of the website could only be accessed by people who can use a computer mouse, which meant that content was not

available to those who are blind, many who have low-vision, and those with disabilities affecting fine motor control; and parts of the website used color combinations that made text difficult or impossible for people with low-vision to see. These barriers deny persons with disabilities access to programs, services, and activities offered on the website and may impede PAVE's communications with persons with disabilities.

Prior to the conclusion of OCR's investigation, PAVE 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 PAVE's website. OCR would have sought to learn, for example, whether PAVE 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 PAVE's willingness to address its website comprehensively without further investigation, OCR determined entering into a voluntary resolution agreement would be appropriate.

Resolution Agreement

PAVE submitted a signed Resolution Agreement (agreement) to OCR on November 30, 2016. PAVE committed to take actions such as:

- making all new website content and functionality accessible to people with disabilities;
- selecting an auditor who has the requisite knowledge and experience to identify barriers to access on PAVE's website and conducting a thorough audit of existing on-line content and functionality;
- developing a corrective action plan to prioritize the removal of on-line barriers over an 18-month period;
- posting a notice to persons with disabilities about how to request access to on-line 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 PAVE's compliance with any other regulatory provision or to address any issues other than those addressed in this letter. OCR will monitor PAVE's implementation of the agreement. When OCR concludes PAVE 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 PAVE fails to implement the agreement, OCR may seek compliance with the federal civil rights laws through any means authorized by law, including enforcing 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 PAVE 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 complainant 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 you extended to OCR in resolving this complaint. We look forward to receiving PAVE's first report about its implementation of the agreement by December 22, 2016. If you have any questions, please contact Noel Nightingale, Lead Attorney, by telephone at (206) 607-1632 or by e-mail at noel.nightingale@ed.gov.

Sincerely,

Paul Goodwin
Team Leader

Enclosure: Resolution Agreement