

American Foundation for the Blind

**Governmental Relations Group
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Mr. David C. Childs
Office of Federal Procurement Policy
NEOB Room 9013
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20503

Re: Proposed revision to office of management and budget circular No.A-76 Performance of Commercial Activities

The American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) is pleased to submit comments in response to the November 19, 2002 notice of proposed change to OMB Circular No. A-76 Performance of Commercial Activities. The proposed changes would provide for revisions to OMB Circular A-76 to improve management of commercial activities that are needed to conduct the business of the government. With these revisions the use of public/private competitions would be expanded to activities performed in-house and through commercial inter-service support agreements (ISSAs). These changes raise a variety of questions and concerns relative to the requirements of title V of the Rehabilitation Act, particularly section 508.

The mission of the American Foundation for the Blind, Helen Keller's cause in the United States, is to help people who are blind or visually impaired achieve equality of access and opportunity that will ensure freedom of choice in their lives. Since 1921, AFB has pursued the dream of a world where the major inequities faced by blind or visually impaired people are eliminated or substantially reduced. Today AFB continues as the nation's leading resource for people who are blind or visually impaired, their families and the professionals who serve them. AFB has a long history of involvement with section 508: from the drafting of original amendment language to its membership of the electronic and information technology access advisory committee. AFB is working as a stakeholder on the accessibility forum and serves on its strategic council and its interoperability project team.

Summary

We are concerned that there are not adequate protection processes to guarantee that persons with disabilities will obtain the comparable access provided for under section 508. The standards established pursuant to section 508 have defined what it means to achieve that guaranteed access to Electronic and Information Technology (E&IT). Without adequate protection processes the goal of section 508 cannot be realized.

Issues

Who will be accountable for ensuring that the requirements of the Rehabilitation Act, particularly sections 501, 503 and 508, are fulfilled?

How will the compliance with these requirements be implemented and enforced?

Analysis

We understand the goal of these proposed changes is to strengthen efforts to ensure that the government is obtaining the best value on the investment of our tax dollars. We just want to ensure that, in the process of reaching these goals, the legal rights afforded to persons with disabilities are protected.

The implementation and compliance with the requirements of the relevant sections of the Rehabilitation Act

require knowledge and expertise. The federal government has made great strides in developing that expertise and knowledge in its establishment of internal management and compliant measures. It will be important for disabled employees to know which offices to go to in order to address concerns related to the various provisions of the Rehabilitation Act. Often issues can be more quickly and easily resolved if an employee can address their individual issues to persons who have training experience and expertise in addressing their concerns. This is especially true for the highly specialized access needs of individuals with disabilities.

We are concerned that contractors will lack the knowledge, skills, and experience in providing appropriate accommodations for disabled persons. Without proper and effective accommodations employees with disabilities are not competing on a level playing field with nondisabled employees.

Sincerely yours,

Joy Relton
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