New Law Makes Technology More Accessible

Center for Persons With Disabilities

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NEW LAW MAKES TECHNOLOGY MORE ACCESSIBLE

On October 8, 2010, President Obama signed into law the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act. This legislation requires smart phones, television programs, emergency broadcast information, and other modern communications technologies to be accessible to people with vision or hearing loss.

Paul Schroeder, Vice President of Programs & Policy at the American Federation for the Blind (AFB) states, "This law is life-changing for the millions of us with disabilities who are too often unable to take advantage of new technologies. It opens the door to the digital age, and gives Americans with visual or hearing impairments equal access to smart phones, emergency broadcast information, the menus and controls on televisions and cable TV guides, and much more."

“The Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act is one of the most significant victories for our community since the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed 20 years ago,” stated Bobbie Beth Scoggins, National Association of the Deaf president. “It will enable 36 million deaf and hard of hearing people to participate in the Internet age by ensuring captioning of television programs on the Internet, a closed caption button on television remote controls, hearing aid compatibility for Internet telephones, and communications equipment for individuals who are deaf-blind, and more.”

Karen Peltz Strauss of Communication Service for the Deaf (CSD) states, "H.R. 3101 (the name of the bill when introduced into Congress and the House of Representatives) puts people with disabilities squarely into 21st Century broadband communications so we can take full advantage of Internet advancements enjoyed by everyone else."

According to Sachin Pavithran, program coordinator at the CPD, this is something that advocates for those with vision impairments have been pushing forever. "In the past, companies have said that the technology wasn't there, but it was more about them making it a priority than coming up with new technology. In the past I would have to pay $300-400 more to have the screen reading software installed into my cell phone. This law will mandate companies to embed it into their software so that it becomes an option, not an extra service. Communication devices will now be 100% accessible right out of the box.” Pavithran is a person with vision impairments and uses assistive technology in his work and everyday life.

Signed into law during National Disability Employment Month, this legislation will increase the opportunities for those with vision or hearing impairments in the work place, the classroom, and in their everyday life.