

# ADA/WEBSITE ACCESSIBILITY

---

## **SPEAKERS:**

Cynthia N. Sass, Esquire  
Sass Law Firm, Tampa, Florida

Eric Singleton, President  
Eric Singleton and Associates, New York, New York

Rebecca Bond, Chief of the Disability Rights Section  
for the Civil Rights Division  
Department of Justice, Washington, D.C.

---

College of Labor & Employment Lawyers  
The 11<sup>th</sup> Circuit Regional Planning Committee  
Coral Gables, Florida  
January 23, 2016

# WEBSITE ACCESSIBILITY FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES<sup>1</sup>

Cynthia N. Sass, Esquire  
Law Offices of Cynthia N. Sass, P.A.  
601 West Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard  
Tampa, Florida 33603  
www.employmentlawtampa.com

---

## I. DISABILITIES AND WEBSITE ACCESSIBILITY

**A. Disabilities Affecting Internet Use.** According to the U.S. Department of Justice (“DOJ”), millions of individuals in the United States have disabilities that can affect their use of internet websites and mobile applications (“apps”). 75 Fed. Reg. 43,462. For example:

1. Individuals with vision impairments may be unable to read the text or view images or videos displayed on the website.
2. Individuals with hearing impairments may be unable to access information in website videos that lack captions.
3. Individuals with mobility impairments regarding their hands may have difficulty navigating a website.
4. Individuals with intellectual impairments may struggle to use portions of websites that require timed responses from users.

**B. Assistive Technology.** Many people with disabilities rely on “assistive technology” to navigate websites and access information contained on those sites.

1. Examples of Assistive Technology.
  - a. Individuals with vision impairments may rely on a screen reader to convert the visual information on a website into speech, i.e., to speak aloud the text found on a webpage.
  - b. Individuals who have mobility impairments regarding their hands may use speech-recognition software to navigate a website.

---

<sup>1</sup> The materials attached are distributed by the Sass Law Firm as a service to clients and other interested individuals. The outlines or information herein are provided for informal use only. This material should not be considered legal advice and should not be used as such. Thank you to Benjamin S. Briggs, Esquire, of the Sass Law Firm for his assistance in preparing these materials.

2. Other Tools to Help Those with Disabilities.

- a. Captions for videos, multimedia presentations, photographs and images.
- b. Adjustable font size and color contrast.
- c. Options to extend or stop timed portions of websites.

**C. Inaccessibility.** However, many websites and apps do not incorporate or activate features that enable disabled individuals to access all information or services.

1. Because screen readers require website code that is comprehensible to the screen reader, visually impaired individuals relying on screen readers may be unable to use websites with incomprehensible code.
2. Individuals who have hearing impairments may be unable to access information in website videos and other multimedia presentations that lack captions.
3. Individuals with limited manual dexterity who may use assistive technology that enables them to interact with websites cannot access sites that do not support keyboard alternatives for mouse commands.
4. Individuals with mental impairments may be unable to use websites that require timed responses but do not give users the ability to indicate that they need more time to respond.

**D. Legal Implications of Inaccessibility.** Multiple federal and state laws may be implicated where websites or apps are not equally accessible to disabled individuals. Most prominent among the federal provisions are the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

## **II. TITLE III OF THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (“TITLE III”)**

### **A. General Overview of the Americans with Disability Act.**

1. General Prohibition. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. §§12101-12213 (“ADA”), prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public.
2. “Disability.” The ADA defines disability broadly as “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.” 42 U.S.C. §12102(1)(A). “Major life activities” include seeing, hearing, performing manual tasks, reading, concentrating, thinking, and learning. 42 U.S.C. §12102(2)(A).

3. Prominent ADA Titles/Sections. The ADA is divided into various titles (or sections) that relate to different areas of public life.
  - a. *Title I: Employment.* Prohibits covered employers from discriminating against an individual on the basis of his or her disability in regard to hiring, compensation, advancement, terms and conditions of employment, or termination.
  - b. *Titles II & III: Accessibility.* Govern accessibility standards and protect disabled individuals' access to facilities, goods, services, privileges, etc. Title II applies to public entities, whereas Title III applies to private entities that are places of public accommodation. Generally speaking, Titles II and III require governmental agencies and private businesses to make their goods and services as accessible to individuals with disabilities as they are to those without disabilities.
4. Agency Enforcement and Regulations.
  - a. *Enforcement of the ADA.* The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (“EEOC”) regulates and enforces Title I, while the DOJ regulates and enforces Titles II and III. However, all state and local governments are covered by Title II—which the DOJ enforces—whether or not they are also covered by Title I (which the EEOC enforces). 29 CFR 1630, Appendix. So, a state or local governmental employer in an ADA employment discrimination case is covered by both Title I and II and the DOJ may enforce the ADA in such a case.<sup>2</sup>
  - b. *Regulations.* Section 204(a) of Title II and §306(b) of Title III direct the attorney general to promulgate regulations to carry out the provisions of Titles II and III, other than certain provisions dealing specifically with transportation. 42 U.S.C. §§12134, 12186(b) (2011).

## **B. General Overview of Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act.**

1. Private Entities Constituting Public Accommodations. Title III applies to any “private entity” that is considered a “place of public accommodation.”
  - a. *Private Entities.* Title III defines a “private entity” simply as “any entity other than a public entity” as defined in Title II. 42 U.S.C. §12181(6). Under Title II, public entities are any state or local government and any department or agency of a state or local government. 42 U.S.C. §12131(1).
  - b. *Public Accommodations.* Title III provides that private entities are considered places of public accommodation if their operations affect commerce and fall within at least one of the following 12 categories:
    - An inn, hotel, motel, or other place of lodging;

---

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., DOJ’s June 2014 settlement announcement with Florida State University. Available at <http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-reaches-settlement-florida-state-university>.

- A restaurant, bar, or other establishment serving food or drink;
- A motion picture house, theater, concert hall, stadium, or other place of exhibition or entertainment;
- An auditorium, convention center, lecture hall, or other place of public gathering;
- A bakery, grocery store, clothing store, hardware store, shopping center, or other sales or rental establishment;
- A laundromat, drycleaner, bank, barber shop, beauty shop, travel service, shoe repair service, funeral parlor, gas station, office of an accountant or lawyer, pharmacy, insurance office, professional office of a health care provider, hospital, or other service establishment;
- A terminal, depot, or other station used for specified public transportation;
- A museum, library, gallery, or other place of public display or collection;
- A park, zoo, amusement park, or other place of recreation;
- A nursery, elementary, secondary, undergraduate, or postgraduate private school, or other place of education;
- A day care center, senior citizen center, homeless shelter, food bank, adoption agency, or other social service center establishment; or
- A gymnasium, health spa, bowling alley, golf course, or other place of exercise or recreation.

42 U.S.C. §12181(7).

- c. *Exemptions.* Title III does “not apply to private clubs or establishments exempted from coverage under title II of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000–a(e))<sup>[3]</sup> or to religious organizations or entities controlled by religious organizations, including places of worship.” 42 U.S.C. §12187.
2. Prohibited Discrimination. Title III requires places of public accommodation to make their goods, services, and accommodations equally accessible to individuals with disabilities:

---

<sup>3</sup> 42 U.S.C. 2000a(e) exempts “a private club or other establishment not in fact open to the public . . . .”

No individual shall be discriminated against on the basis of disability in the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations of any place of public accommodation by any person who owns, leases (or leases to), or operates a place of public accommodation.

42 U.S.C. §12182(a).

3. Remedies. Title III adopts the remedies set forth in §204(a) of the 1964 Civil Rights Act (42 U.S.C. §§2000a-3(a)). 42 U.S.C. §12188(a). These remedies include:
  - Injunctive Relief. 42 U.S.C. §2000a-3; 28 C.F.R. §§36.501(a) and (b).
  - Reasonable Attorneys' Fees and Litigation Expenses (including experts' fees) to the Prevailing Party. 42 U.S.C. §12205; 28 C.F.R. §36.505; *Lovell v. Chandler*, 303 F.3d 1039, 1058-1059 (9th Cir. 2002), *cert. denied*, 537 U.S. 1105 (2003) (Title II case).
  - Monetary Damages. Only recoverable in an action brought by the Attorney General in cases of general public importance or a "pattern or practice" of discrimination is alleged. 42 U.S.C. §12188(b)(2)(B); *Powell v. National Bd. of Medical Examiners*, 364 F.3d 79, 86 (2d Cir. 2004); *Wander v. Kaus*, 304 F.3d 856, 858 (9th Cir. 2002); *Hobleman v. Kentucky Fried Chicken*, 260 F. Supp. 2d 801, 805 (D. Neb. 2003); *Dorsey v. Detroit*, 157 F. Supp. 2d 729, 733 (E.D. Mich. 2001); *U.S. v. Morvant*, 843 F. Supp. 1092, 1095-1096 (E.D. La. 1994).

**C. Application to Website Accessibility.** As discussed below, courts are split on whether, and to what extent, Title III of the ADA applies to business' websites and apps. This judicial split and legal uncertainty exists because neither Title III's statutory language nor its regulations specifically address website accessibility.

1. Neither the ADA's Statutory Language nor its Regulations Specifically Address Website Accessibility. The DOJ acknowledges that "the Internet as it is known today did not exist when Congress enacted the ADA and, therefore, neither the ADA nor the regulations the Department promulgated under the ADA specifically address access to Web sites." 75 Fed. Reg. 43,463.
2. ADA Regulations. While the DOJ has promulgated specific accessibility standards for Titles II and III, the current regulations implementing Titles II and III do not include any specific website accessibility standards. However, since 2010, the DOJ has taken steps to revise the ADA regulations in order to establish requirements for website accessibility under Title II and III.
  - a. *2010 Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking ("ANPR").* On July 26, 2010, the DOJ issued an ANPR stating that it was considering revising the regulations implementing Titles II and III to establish website accessibility standards for the websites of public entities and public accommodations and to require public entities

and public accommodations that provide products or services to the public through the Internet to make their websites accessible to individuals with disabilities. 75 Fed. Reg. 43,460, 462.

- Historical Context. “When the ADA was enacted in 1990, the Internet as we know it today—the ubiquitous infrastructure for information and commerce—did not exist.” 75 Fed. Reg. 43,461.
- Subsequent Technological Developments. “Increasingly, private entities are providing goods and services to the public through Web sites that operate as places of public accommodation under title III of the ADA. Similarly, many public entities under title II are using Web sites to provide the public access to their programs, services, and activities.” 75 Fed. Reg. 43,461.
- Problem of Inaccessibility. “Many Web sites of public accommodations and governmental entities, however, render use by individuals with disabilities difficult or impossible due to barriers posed by Web sites designed without accessible features.” 75 Fed. Reg. 43,461.

The ADA’s promise to provide an equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities to participate in and benefit from all aspects of American civic and economic life will be achieved in today’s technologically advanced society only if it is clear to State and local governments, businesses, educators, and other public accommodations that their Web sites must be accessible. Consequently, the Department is considering amending its title II and title III regulations to require public entities and public accommodations that provide products or services to the public through Web sites on the Internet to make their sites accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities under the legal framework established by the ADA.

75 Fed. Reg. 43,462.

- Title III Applies to Websites. The DOJ asserted that although “neither the ADA nor the regulations the Department promulgated under the ADA specifically address access to Web sites . . . the statute’s broad and expansive nondiscrimination mandate reaches goods and services provided by covered entities on Web sites over the Internet.” 75 Fed. Reg. 43,463.

The plain language of these statutory provisions applies to discrimination in offering the goods and services ‘of’ a place of public accommodation or the services, programs, and activities ‘of’ a public entity, rather than being limited to those goods and services provided ‘at’ or ‘in’ a place of public accommodation or facility of a public entity. Instead, the ADA mandate for ‘full and equal enjoyment’ requires

nondiscrimination by a place of public accommodation in the offering of all its goods and services, including those offered via websites.

75 Fed. Reg. 43,463 (citations omitted).

- b. *Separate Rulemakings for Title II and Title III.* The DOJ subsequently announced that it was dividing the rulemaking process so as to proceed with separate notices of proposed rulemaking for Title II and Title III. See Unified Agenda, 78 Fed. Reg. 1317, at 1415 (Jan. 8, 2013).
- c. *Current Timetable for Proposed Regulations.* After multiple delays, the DOJ announced that it will issue the Title II website accessibility regulation in early 2016, but it will not issue any Title III regulations for public accommodations websites until fiscal year 2018.

**D. Case Law: Split among Federal District Courts.** The legal landscape regarding this issue remains conflicted as courts have split over the issue of whether the term “places of public accommodation” applies to websites and, if so, to what extent.

The two most prominent lines of decision addressing website accessibility are (1) courts holding that places of public accommodation are not limited to physical locations and, thus, Title III does not require an actual physical location, and (2) courts that hold that places of public accommodations are limited to physical locations and Title III requires a nexus between an actual physical structure and the goods, services, or privileges denied.

1. Public Accommodations Do Not Require Any Physical Location. This line of cases does not limit “places of public accommodation” to actual physical places under Title III of the ADA. This view has been adopted by federal courts in at least the First, Second, and Seventh circuits.

a. *The First Circuit.*

- *Carparts Distribution Ctr., Inc. v. Automotive Wholesaler’s Assoc. of New England, Inc.*, 37 F.3d 12, 19-20 (1st Cir. 1994). Employee (and employer) sued employer’s health insurance provider for discriminating against him on the basis of his disability. The court allowed plaintiff’s Title III claim to proceed against the insurance provider even though it had no physical place of business patronized by customers. The court concluded that Title III is not limited to provision of goods and services provided in physical structures, but also covers access to goods and services offered by a place of public accommodation through other mediums, such as telephone or mail. “It would be irrational to conclude that persons who enter an office to purchase services are protected by the ADA, but persons who purchase the same services over the telephone or by mail are not. Congress could not have intended such an absurd result.” “Neither Title III nor its implementing regulations make any mention of physical boundaries or physical entry. Many goods and services are sold



over the telephone or by mail with customers never physically entering the premises of a commercial entity.”

- *National Ass’n of the Deaf v. Netflix*, 869 F. Supp. 2d 196, 200-201 (D. Mass. 2012) (citing *Carparts*). The court held that Netflix’s watch-instantly video streaming website was a place of public accommodation even though its web-based services could only be accessed in private residences. “The ADA covers the services ‘of’ a public accommodation, not services ‘at’ or ‘in’ a public accommodation. . . . Consequently, while the home is not itself a place of public accommodation, entities that provide services in the home may qualify as places of public accommodation.” The court also noted that “the legislative history of the ADA makes clear that Congress intended the ADA to adapt to changes in technology.”

b. *The Second Circuit.*

- *National Federation for the Blind v. Scribd*, 97 F. Supp. 3d 565 (D. Vt. 2015). Scribd’s “NetFlix-for-books” program allows subscribers to read ebooks from its library for a small monthly fee. Plaintiffs alleged that “because Scribd’s website and apps are not programmed to be accessible through [screen reader] software, Scribd is denying blind persons access to all of the services, privileges, advantages, and accommodations that Scribd offers and is excluding them from accessing information critical to their education, employment, and community integration.” Scribd moved to dismiss on the basis that Title III does not apply to a website-only business and that “place of public accommodation” requires that the business have a physical place where it offers its goods and services to the public. Relying on *National Ass’n of the Deaf v. Netflix*, the district court denied Scribd’s motion and found that Scribd’s services fall within at least one of Title III’s enumerated categories of public accommodations.

c. *The Seventh Circuit.*

- *Doe v. Mutual of Omaha Ins. Co.*, 179 F.3d 557, 559 (7th Cir. 1999). “The core meaning of” Title III’s anti-discrimination provision “is that the owner or operator of a store, hotel, restaurant, dentist’s office, travel agency, theater, website, or other facility (whether in physical space or in electronic space) that is open to the public cannot exclude disabled persons from entering the facility and, once in, from using the facility in the same way that the nondisabled do.”

2. The Nexus Theory. This line of cases limits “places of public accommodation” under Title III to actual physical locations and requires a nexus between the website or apps providing goods, services, or privileges and the actual physical place of public accommodation.

Thus, under the Nexus theory, Title III does not cover web-only businesses that lack an actual physical place of public accommodation. For instance, this line of cases makes a distinction between Target—a retail company with a physical place of accommodation as well as a website—and eBay, which has no physical location providing goods, services, or privileges to the public. Federal courts in at least the Third, Sixth, Ninth, and Eleventh circuits have adopted the nexus theory.

a. *The Third Circuit.*

- *Ford v. Schering-Plough Corp.*, 145 F.3d 601, 612-613 (3d Cir. 1998). Former employee sued her employer and the insurance carrier for providing benefits that allegedly discriminated against individuals with disabilities. The court affirmed the lower court’s dismissal of plaintiff’s Title III claim because there was no nexus between a physical place of public accommodation and the insurance benefits offered by the employer. The court held that although “an insurance office is a public accommodation,” that “does not mean that the insurance policies offered at that location are covered by Title III.” *Id.* at 612. The court held that places of public accommodation under Title III refer to physical places and that because the plaintiff “received her disability benefits via her employment . . . , she had no nexus to” the insurance office “and thus was not discriminated against in connection with a public accommodation.” *Id.* at 612-613. The court further held that Title III’s reference to “goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations” does not provide “protection from discrimination unrelated to places.” *Id.* at 613.

b. *The Sixth Circuit.*

- *Stoutenborough v. National Football League*, 59 F.3d 580, 583-584 (6th Cir. 1995). The court affirmed the dismissal of plaintiff’s claim under Title III because the challenged service, the live telecast of a football game, was not offered by a place of public accommodation (the football stadium). The court found that a place of public accommodation is “a facility, operated by a private entity”—which is a physical place. *Id.* at 583. The court also found that the “service” plaintiff sought to obtain—the televised broadcast of home football games—“does not involve a ‘place of public accommodation.’” *Id.* It did not suffice that the football games were played in a place of public accommodation under Title III (the stadium). *Id.*

c. *The Ninth Circuit.*

- *Weyer v. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corp.*, 198 F.3d 1104, 1114-1116 (9th Cir. 2000). Former employee sued her employer and the insurance administrator for providing benefits that allegedly discriminated against individuals with mental disabilities. The court affirmed the lower court’s dismissal of plaintiff’s Title III claim. The court found that Title III’s term, “place of public accommodation,” requires “some connection between the good

or service complained of and an actual physical place.” *Id.* at 1114. The court noted that this list of “public accommodations” in §12181(7) are all “actual, physical places where goods or services are open to the public, and places where the public gets those goods or services.” *Id.* Citing *Ford v. Schering-Plough Corp.*, the court held that plaintiff had not demonstrated the necessary nexus between the goods or services in question (disability benefits) and the physical place of accommodation (insurance office). *Id.* at 1115.

- *National Federation for the Blind v. Target, Inc.*, 452 F. Supp. 2d 946, 953-54 (N.D. Cal. 2006). Class of visually impaired plaintiffs alleged that they could not access Target’s website to purchase products, redeem gift cards, or find Target stores. The district court noted that the Ninth Circuit has limited “a ‘place of public accommodation,’ within the meaning of Title III, to a physical place” and “has declined to join those circuits which have suggested that a ‘place of public accommodation’ may have a more expansive meaning.” *Id.* at 952 (citing *Carparts* and *Doe*). The court nonetheless rejected Target’s argument that the ADA prohibits “only discrimination occurring on the premises of a place of public accommodation, and that ‘discrimination’ is limited to the denial of physical entry to, or use of, a space.” *Id.* at 953.

The statute applies to the services *of* a place of public accommodation, not services *in* a place of public accommodation. To limit the ADA to discrimination in the provision of services occurring on the premises of a public accommodation would contradict the plain language of the statute. [*Id.*]

The court found there was enough of a nexus between the use of the website services and those provided at the actual bricks-and-mortar stores to bring the website within the definition of a “place of public accommodation.” Concluding that “[a]lthough the Ninth Circuit has determined that a place of public accommodation is a physical space,” accessibility under Title III is not limited to access to that physical space, but rather includes access to goods and services provided by public accommodation. *Id.* at 955.

- *Young v. Facebook, Inc.*, 790 F. Supp. 2d 1110, 1115 (N.D. Cal. 2011) (dismissing ADA claim against Facebook® because, in part, “Facebook operates only in cyberspace, and thus is not a ‘place of public accommodation’ as construed by the Ninth Circuit”).
- *Ouellette v. Viacom*, No. CV 10-133-M-DWM-JCL (D. Mont. Mar. 31, 2011) (citing *Weyer*) (dismissing ADA claims against various websites including Google.com, YouTube.com, and MySpace.com on the grounds that “[n]either a website nor its servers are ‘actual, physical places where goods or services are open to the public,’ putting them within the ambit of the ADA”).

- *Cullen v. Netflix*, 880 F. Supp. 2d 1017, 1023-24 (N.D. Cal. 2012) (web-only Netflix Internet services had no nexus to a place of public accommodation within meaning of ADA; conflicts with *National Ass'n of the Deaf v. Netflix*).
- *Jancik v. Redbox Automated Retail, LLC*, No. SACV 13-1387-DOC, 2014 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 67223 (C.D. Cal. May 14, 2014) (Redbox Digital is not required to caption library of web-based videos for hearing-impaired customers because website is not place of public accommodation).
- *Earll v. eBay, Inc.*, No. 13-15134 (9th Cir. April 1, 2015). Plaintiff brought a putative class action under Title III of the ADA and state law, alleging that eBay's seller verification system is inaccessible to the deaf community. The district court dismissed the ADA claim. The appellate court affirmed the dismissal, holding that "[b]ecause eBay's services are not connected to any 'actual, physical place[],' eBay is not subject to the ADA."

d. *The Eleventh Circuit.*

- *Rendon v. Valleycrest Prod., Ltd.*, 294 F.3d 1279 (11th Cir. 2002). The Eleventh Circuit held that the telephone process for selecting contestants for "Who Wants to be a Millionaire" discriminated against people with hearing and other physical disabilities. *Id.* at 1280-1281. The court found that the studio where the show was filmed was a place of public accommodation and that competing on the show was a privilege provided by the place of public accommodation. *Id.* at 1283-1284. Thus, the court held that by using a discriminatory telephonic process for screening potential contestants, defendant was denying disabled persons equal enjoyment of a privilege (competing on the show) of a place of public accommodation (the studio). *Id.* at 1284-1285. The show selected contestants by utilizing an automated telephone answering system whereby potential contestants would answer questions. *Id.* at 1280. "Aspiring contestants call a toll-free number on which a recorded message prompts them to answer a series of questions. Callers record their answers to these questions by pressing the appropriate keys on their telephone keypads." *Id.* The plaintiffs were potential contestants with hearing or mobility impairments and were unable to register their answers either because they could not hear the automated questions or could not move their fingers fast enough on the phone pad to record their answers. *Id.* at 1280-1281.
- *Access Now v. Southwest Airlines*, 227 F. Supp. 2d 1312 (S.D. Fla. 2002). The court held that plaintiff failed to state a claim under the ADA because it alleged that the inaccessibility of southwest.com prevented access to Southwest's "virtual" ticket counters. *Id.* at 1321. "Virtual" ticket counters are not actual, physical places, and therefore not places of public accommodation. *Id.*

3. Takeaway Regarding the Case Law Split.

- a. Currently, whether, and to what extent, Title III of the ADA applies to websites depends in no small part on where the plaintiff brings the claim.
- b. The implication of this split is that online-only entities with a broad geographic presence face a patchwork of liability based on where a plaintiff is located. By way of example, Netflix and its exclusively Internet-based business found itself on both sides of the split in 2012. The U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts ruled that Netflix’s video streaming website is a “place of public accommodation” covered under Title III, even though the website has no nexus to a physical place. Conversely, later that same year, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California reached the opposite conclusion in *Cullen v. Netflix, Inc.*, concluding that Netflix’s web-based services lacked the necessary nexus to an “actual physical place.”

#### **E. Notable Settlements.**

1. H&R Block. *NFB, et al. v. HRB Digital LLC and HRB Tax Group Inc.*, No. 1:13-cv-10799-GAO (D. Mass. April 2013). Plaintiffs alleged that H&R Block violated Title III and state disability law because its website was inaccessible to people with various disabilities. Soon after the DOJ intervened, H&R Block agreed to a consent decree under which it would make its website, tax preparation tool, and apps conform to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (“WCAG”).
2. Peapod. In November of 2014, the DOJ announced that it had reached a settlement agreement with the owners and operators of [www.peapod.com](http://www.peapod.com), a leading internet grocer. The DOJ had alleged that the online grocer’s website violated Title III by being inaccessible to disabled customers. Under the agreement, Peapod is required to adopt measures to ensure that users with disabilities are able to fully and equally enjoy the various goods, services, facilities and accommodations provided through [www.peapod.com](http://www.peapod.com). These measures include:
  - Ensure that [www.peapod.com](http://www.peapod.com) and its apps conform to, at minimum, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0;
  - Designate an employee as web accessibility coordinator for [www.peapod.com](http://www.peapod.com), who will report directly to a Peapod, LLC executive;
  - Retain an independent website accessibility consultant, who will annually evaluate the accessibility of the website and its apps;
  - Adopt a formal web accessibility policy;
  - Provide a notice on [www.peapod.com](http://www.peapod.com) soliciting feedback from visitors on how website accessibility can be improved;
  - Provide for accessibility testing of [www.peapod.com](http://www.peapod.com) and its apps; and

- Provide mandatory annual training on website accessibility for Peapod’s website content personnel.
3. edX, Inc. In April 2015, the DOJ reached a settlement agreement with edX Inc., a provider of purely online educational courses with no connection to a physical location. The settlement resolved allegations that edX’s website violated Title III because it was not fully accessible to individuals with disabilities. In the settlement, edX entered a four-year agreement to make its system “fully accessible within 18 months.” The agreement also requires edX to provide training for course creators, appoint web accessibility positions, solicit feedback, and “retain a consultant to evaluate conformance of the website, platform, and mobile applications.”
  4. Carnival Corporation (Carnival Cruise Line). In July 2015, the DOJ entered into a landmark settlement agreement with Carnival to improve the physical accessibility of 62 cruise ships. The agreement also addressed the accessibility of Carnival’s website and apps, requiring that they comply with the WCAG. The agreement further required Carnival “include a section or link on each of the Covered Websites explaining the Company’s accessibility policies and identifying the designated ADA Responsibility Officer . . . .”
  5. Target. *National Federation for the Blind v. Target, Inc.*, 452 F. Supp. 2d 946, 953 (N.D. Cal. 2006). Class of visually impaired plaintiffs brought claims under Title III and state disability law (which allowed for damages), alleging that they could not access Target’s website to purchase products, redeem gift cards, or find Target stores. The parties reached a settlement following the federal district court’s denial of Target’s motion to dismiss. As part of the settlement, Target agreed to make changes to its website to ensure “that blind guests using screen-reader software may acquire the same information and engage in the same transactions as are available to sighted guests with substantially equivalent ease of use.” In addition, Target agreed to pay more than \$6 million to the class and \$20,000 to a nonprofit corporation dedicated to helping the blind.

#### **F. Notable Pending Cases.**

1. Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The National Association of the Deaf sued Harvard and MIT, respectively, under Title III of the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, alleging that they had failed to caption the many thousands of videos that are posted to their various websites.

Both schools asked the federal court to stay their respective cases until the DOJ issues final regulations specifying what the law requires of public accommodations websites or, alternatively, to dismiss the cases on other grounds. In June 2015, the DOJ filed statements of interest in the cases against Harvard and MIT. The most significant takeaway in the DOJ’s statements of interest is its assertion that there is a “preexisting” obligation for public accommodations to have accessible websites regardless of any yet

pending regulation. The DOJ stated that “**the scope and timing of any final rule on web accessibility is speculative and far from imminent**” and **the obligation to make public accommodations websites accessible exists right now, even in the absence of any new regulations.**

2. NBA. *Jahoda v. National Basketball Association*, No. 2:15-cv-01462 (W.D. Pa. Nov. 6, 2015).<sup>4</sup> In November 2015, a visually impaired plaintiff sued the NBA, alleging a violation of Title III and seeking a permanent injunction requiring the NBA to (1) implement corporate policies that ensure website accessibility for the blind; and (2) format its website so that it is compatible with screen reading or text-to-audio software, upon which the visually impaired rely to use the Internet.
3. Home Depot. *Diaz v. The Home Depot Inc.*, No. 1:15cv09178 (S.D. N.Y. Nov. 20, 2015). The visually impaired plaintiff alleges that Home Depot’s website currently relies on an exclusively visual interface that denies blind people full and equal access to its website.
4. Reebok. *Jose Del-Orden v. Reebok International Ltd.*, No. 1:15-cv-08101 (S.D. N.Y. Oct. 14, 2015). Plaintiff filed a putative class action against Reebok, seeking to represent a nationwide class of visually impaired consumers who he says have been denied equal access to Reebok’s website in violation of Title III. Plaintiff alleges Reebok’s website relies on an exclusively visual interface and “contains thousands of access barriers that make it difficult if not impossible for blind customers to use the website” or “even complete a transaction.”

In September 2015, the same plaintiff filed similar lawsuits against *Kohl’s Corp.* and *J.C. Penney Co. Inc.*, claiming ADA violations due to their inaccessible websites.

**G. Rise in Title III Claims.** In recent years, there has been a marked rise in Title III disability discrimination claims predicated on access to websites and apps,<sup>5</sup> which dictates that private entities should take notice.

### III. OTHER LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OF INACCESSIBLE WEBSITES

#### A. Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

1. General Overview of Title II of the ADA.
  - a. *Public Entities.* Title II applies to public entities, which the statute defines as any state or local government, any department or agency of a state or local government,

---

<sup>4</sup> The plaintiff in this action, Robert Jahoda, has filed approximately 70 similar lawsuits since 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Seyfarth Shaw LLP (analyzing data from PACER, the federal court electronic docket system), available at <http://www.adatitleiii.com/2015/04/ada-title-iii-lawsuits-surge-by-more-than-63-to-over-4400-in-2014/>; <http://www.adatitleiii.com/2015/11/ada-title-iii-lawsuit-numbers-hold-steady-for-first-half-of-2015/>.

and the National Railroad Passenger Corporation and any commuter authority. 42 U.S.C. §12131(1).

- b. *Prohibited Discrimination.* “Subject to the provisions of this subchapter, no qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of such disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of a public entity, or be subjected to discrimination by any such entity.” 42 U.S.C. §12132.

Thus, Title II requires public entities to make their programs, services and activities equally accessible to individuals with disabilities.

- c. *Remedies.* Title II provides that the remedies for disability discrimination are the same as those set forth in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. §794a, which in turn adopts the remedies available under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. These remedies include:

- Injunctive relief.
- Reasonable attorneys’ fees to the prevailing party. 29 U.S.C. §794a(b).
- Compensatory damages. Private individuals may recover compensatory damages under Title II, but only in cases of intentional discrimination. *Liese v. Indian River County Hosp. Dist.*, 701 F.3d 334, 346 (11th Cir. 2012). The Eleventh Circuit held that in the context of either the Rehabilitation Act or Title VI, a plaintiff may establish discriminatory intent by showing deliberate indifference. *Id.* at 347-348.
- Punitive damages are NOT available. *Barnes v. Gorman*, 536 U.S. 181, 189, 122 S. Ct. 2097 (2002).

2. Application to Website Accessibility. Unlike Title III’s application to websites, there is little debate that Title II of the ADA applies to websites and apps of covered public entities.
3. 2003 DOJ Guidelines. In 2003, the DOJ published guidelines for state and local governments to make government websites more accessible.<sup>6</sup> These guidelines stated that one way to meet the Title II’s general requirement that public entities provide qualified individuals with disabilities equal access to their programs, services, or activities “is to ensure that government websites have accessible features for people with disabilities.”

The DOJ further noted that the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 also imposes similar requirements on the private entity if it receives federal funding.

---

<sup>6</sup> *Accessibility of State and Local Government Websites to People with Disabilities*, U.S. Dep’t of Justice (June 2003), available at <http://www.ada.gov/websites2.htm>.



#### 4. Notable Examples of Cases and Settlements.

- a. *American Council of the Blind, et al., v. United States General Services Administration*, Civil Action No. 14-671 (D.C. April 22, 2014). The American Council of the Blind and three individuals filed suit in the federal District Court for the District of Columbia against the U.S. General Services Administration (“GSA”). The complaint alleged that GSA’s website, SAM.gov, violates Title II and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 because it is inaccessible to certain visually impaired individuals and prevents impaired government contractors from registering or timely renewing their government contracts. According to the complaint, SAM.gov was not “viewable” by the types of talking screen readers on which millions of visually impaired individuals rely to navigate the Internet. As a result, visually impaired federal contractors were required to divulge sensitive, personal information (social security numbers, usernames, passwords, etc.) to third parties so that the third parties could enter the individuals’ information into SAM.gov. The complaint further alleges that SAM.gov’s helpdesk and technical assistance staff were not equipped to effectively assist blind and visually impaired users. The complaint noted that the GSA requires federal contractors to provide visually impaired users equal access to the contractors’ websites in compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the GSA should be required to abide by the same standard and ensure equal access to SAM.gov.

On November 10, 2015, the plaintiffs announced that the parties had reached a settlement, which requires GSA to make significant changes to SAM.gov to make it more accessible. Interestingly, the announcement did not reference the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.0), even though the DOJ has been using this set of guidelines for all of its website settlements with private businesses.

- b. *Dudley v Univ. of Miami*, No. 1:14-cv-00038 (S.D. Ohio 2015). With the assistance of the National Federation of the Blind (“NFB”), a blind student at the University of Miami (Ohio) sued the university for disability discrimination in violation of Title II of the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. The United States intervened as an additional plaintiff. The plaintiffs alleged that, among other things, the university purchased and deployed inaccessible course management and assignment software. This prevented the student from being able to use text-to-speech software to obtain the information she needed to succeed in her courses. As of this writing, it appears that this case is still pending.
- c. For additional cases brought under Title II of the ADA, please see the cases discussed under the Rehabilitation Act, below.

#### **B. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as Amended in 1992 and 1998 (“Rehab Act”).**

1. General Overview of the Rehab Act. Like the ADA, the Rehab Act is a civil rights law that protects individuals with disabilities from discrimination.

- a. *Purpose.* The Rehab Act is the federal law that authorizes the formula grant programs for vocational rehabilitation, supported employment, independent living, and client assistance. It also includes a variety of provisions focused on rights, advocacy and protections for individuals with disabilities.
- b. *“Individual with a Disability.”* The Rehab Act defines an “individual with a disability” as anyone who “has a physical or mental impairment which for such individual constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment; and can benefit in terms of an employment outcome from vocational rehabilitation services . . . .” 29 U.S.C. §705(20); 29 U.S.C. §794(a).
- c. *Coverage.* The Rehab Act applies to the following groups:
  - The federal government and federal agencies;
  - Federal contractors; and
  - Recipients of federal funding, including private businesses or organizations. *Barnes*, 536 U.S. at 185.

Note that the Rehab Act’s coverage may overlap with that of the ADA and an entity or program may be covered by both laws. For instance, state and local government entities that receive federal funding could be covered under both the Rehab Act and Title II of the ADA. Likewise, a private university that receives federal funding could be a covered entity under both the Rehab Act and Title III.<sup>7</sup>

- d. *Employment Discrimination.* The standards for determining employment discrimination under the Rehab Act—against employers or federal contractors—are the same as those used in Title I of the ADA.
- e. *Remedies.* As discussed above, the remedies available for disability discrimination under the Rehab Act, 29 U.S.C. §794a, are the same as those available under Title II of the ADA. *Barnes*, 536 U.S. at 184-185. These remedies include:
  - Injunctive relief.
  - Reasonable attorneys’ fees to the prevailing party. 29 U.S.C. §794a(b).
  - Compensatory damages. Private individuals may recover compensatory damages under Section 504 of the Rehab Act, but only in cases of intentional discrimination. *Liese*, 701 F.3d at 346. A plaintiff may establish discriminatory intent by showing deliberate indifference. *Id.* at 347-348.

---

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., *Argenyi v. Creighton University*, 703 F.3d 441 (8th Cir. 2013) (medical student with a hearing disability brought suit under Title III and Section 504 of the Rehab Act, alleging school failed to reasonably accommodate his need for lectures to be transcribed).

- Punitive damages are NOT available. *Barnes*, 536 U.S. at 189.
- f. *Sections Relevant to Website Accessibility.* As discussed below, Sections 504 and 508 are relevant to the accessibility of websites and apps to people with disabilities.
  - g. *Enforcement and Administrative Requirements.* The U.S. Department of Justice Office of Civil Rights (“OCR”) enforces Sections 504 and 508. An aggrieved person under Sections 504 or 508 may file a formal complaint through the OCR or, alternatively, file a private lawsuit in federal district court.
2. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, 29 U.S.C. §794. Section 504 of the Rehab Act was the first civil rights legislation designed to protect individuals with disabilities from discrimination based on their disability status.
    - a. *Prohibits Disability Discrimination.* Section 504 provides that no individual with a disability “shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” 29 U.S.C. §794(a). Businesses, organizations, or agencies that receive federal funds must make their programs and activities accessible to individuals with disabilities.
    - b. *Parallels to Title II of the ADA.* Section 504 and Title II of the ADA provide the same remedies. Title II applies the same requirements to state and local government entities that Section 504 applies to federal government entities and those receive federal funding. Between the two laws, all government-funded programs are covered; and there are many programs and entities that are covered by both laws at the same time.
  3. Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, 29 U.S.C. §794d.
    - a. *Accessibility Requirements.* Section 508 provides that each federal department or agency, “[w]hen developing, procuring, maintaining, or using electronic and information technology, . . . shall ensure, unless an undue burden would be imposed on the department or agency, that the electronic and information technology allows” both federal employees and the general public access equal to those without disabilities. 29 U.S.C. §794d(a)(1)(A).
      - Federal employees. Section 508 guarantees federal employees with disabilities “access to and use of information and data that is comparable to” that of federal employees without disabilities. 29 U.S.C. §794d(a)(1)(A)(i).
      - General public. Section 508 also guarantees that members of the general public with disabilities who are “seeking information or services from a Federal department or agency” will “have access to and use of information and data that

is comparable to” members of the public who do not have disabilities.  
29 U.S.C. §794d(a)(1)(A)(ii).

- b. *Prohibits Disability Discrimination.* Thus, Section 508 requires federal electronic and information technology to be accessible to individuals with disabilities, including federal employees and members of the general public.
  - c. *Relation between Sections 504 and 508.* Section 504 provides the Rehab Act’s general prohibition against disability discrimination, while Section 508 specifically addresses accessibility standards for federal electronic and information technology as it relates to individuals with disabilities. Thus, complying with Section 508 is one method of complying with Section 504. Section 504 provides the remedies and cause of action for disability discrimination under the Rehab Act.
4. Notable Cases and Settlements.
- a. *American Council of the Blind, et al., v. United States General Services Administration,* Civil Action No. 14-671 (D.C. April 22, 2014). The American Council of the Blind and three individuals filed suit against the GSA for violations of Section 504 of the Rehab Act and Title II of the ADA regarding GSA’s website, SAM.gov. Parties settled in November 2015. (See further discussion of case under Title II section, above.)
  - b. *University of Cincinnati and Youngstown State University.* Two separate OCR complaints against Ohio universities were settled in December 2014, with very similar resolution agreements. In relevant part, the OCR investigation in both cases found that the universities failed to comply with Section 504 of the Rehab Act and Title II of the ADA due to their inaccessible websites. In both resolution agreements, the universities agreed to several remedial efforts, including developing a website accessibility policy and accompanying implementation and remediation plan; providing training to staff; reviewing their websites, e-learning platforms, and other information technologies and developing remediation plans; and ensuring comparable access to computer labs and the provision of assistive technology.
  - c. *Penn State University.* The National Federation of the Blind (“NFB”) filed a complaint against the university because a variety of computer and technology-based websites were inaccessible to blind students and faculty. According to the complaint, visually impaired students encountered departmental websites with images and links that were inaccessible to the read-aloud software the students used to navigate the Internet. The complaint also alleged that the university’s ANGEL course-management software (which has since been acquired by Blackboard) “is almost totally inaccessible for blind users.” ANGEL’s standard version was inaccessible (including e-mail, calendar, assignments, chat, discussion groups and gradebook), and blind students were required to use a “PDA mode” with less utility than the standard version.

In the parties' 2013 settlement, the university agreed to complete a technology accessibility audit; develop a corrective action strategy based on the audit findings; develop a policy and accompanying procedures; institute procurement procedures requiring bidders to meet WCAG 2.0 Level AA standard for web-based technology and Section 508 standards for other technology; bring all university websites up to WCAG 2.0 Level AA compliance; replace their ANGEL learning management system with one that meets Section 508 guidelines; implement accessibility solutions for classroom technologies including podiums and displays, as well as remote-control-like devices that allowed students to answer multiple-choice questions during lectures ("clickers"); and request accessibility of websites and ATMs of banks that have a contractual relationship with the university.

- d. *Florida State University*. With the assistance of the NFB, two blind students filed a lawsuit against Florida State University ("FSU"), alleging that the Department of Mathematics violated Section 504 of the Rehab Act and Title II of the ADA by failing to provide them with appropriate accommodations. The complaint alleged that various inaccessible technologies were used for course instruction, including a web-based application and clickers. Specifically, the students could not access software that was used for homework and tests, and the course also relied on inaccessible clickers. The parties reached a settlement in 2012, under which FSU agreed to pay each student \$75,000 and "to continue its efforts to make courses accessible to all students." FSU did not admit liability or wrongdoing.
- e. *Sabino v. Ohio State University*, No. 2:09-cv-544 (S.D. Ohio) and *Mitchell v. University of Kentucky, et al.*, No. 5:11-cv-152 (E.D. Ky. May 4, 2011). In separate complaints, the National Association of the Deaf ("NAD") alleged that both universities violated Section 504 and Title II due to the lack of access to public service announcements, play-by-play commentary, and other audio content at university football games. The cases settled in 2010 and 2012, respectively, with both universities agreeing to display captions of public address announcements, including play-by-play and player introductions, on the scoreboard and ribbon boards, as well as televisions in the concourse areas.
- f. *Maricopa Community College District*, No. CV 12-907-PHX-NVW (D. Ariz. May 22, 2012). The NFB and a blind student who recently graduated from Mesa Community College filed a lawsuit alleging that the college violated Section 504 and Title II because its third-party websites and software applications used for coursework did not work with screen reading software and that clickers were used that are not accessible to blind students. In the parties' 2014 settlement, the college agreed to take a series of steps to procure and deploy electronic and information technology that is accessible to all students, including those who are blind. Specific technologies covered by the settlement are consistent with those covered in OCR resolutions, including Penn State University profiled above.

- g. *University of Montana*. In 2014, the University of Montana reached an agreement with the OCR stemming from a 2012 student complaint to OCR that the university was discriminating against students with disabilities. The OCR alleged that the university violated Section 504 of the Rehab Act and Title II of the ADA because of its inaccessible internet technology, including library database materials, web-based course registration, and videos without captions. The parties reached a settlement in 2014, requiring the university to develop and establish an electronic and information technology policy “that demonstrates its commitment to implementing accessibility.” Specific technologies covered by the settlement are consistent with those covered in OCR resolutions, including Penn State University profiled above.

### **C. Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act.**

#### 1. General Overview of Title I of the ADA.

- a. *Employers*. Applies to employers with 15 or more employees.
- b. *Purpose and Requirements*. Designed to help people with disabilities have the same employment opportunities and benefits available to people without disabilities. Prohibits disability discrimination in employment, and requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations to qualified applicants or employees.
- c. *Remedies*.
- Injunctive relief.
  - Employer may be compelled to hire, reinstate, or provide a reasonable accommodation to the prevailing plaintiff.
  - Compensatory damages. Compensatory damages may be awarded for actual monetary losses (back pay) and for future monetary losses (front pay), mental anguish, and inconvenience.
  - Punitive damages. Punitive damages may be available as well, if an employer acts with malice or reckless indifference.
  - Reasonable attorneys’ fees.

2. Application to Website Accessibility. Unlike Titles II and III, Title I of the ADA is not directed toward access to goods, services, facilities, and privileges. Rather, it addresses employment opportunities and the terms and conditions of employment.

- a. The EEOC, the agency frequently responsible for enforcing Title I of the ADA, which prohibits disability-based discrimination in employment, has said very little about the issue of website and apps accessibility.
  - b. However, it appears that Title I at least requires private employers without accessible employment websites to ensure that disabled applicants have an alternate way to look and apply for jobs and requires employers to engage in the interactive process to discuss what reasonable accommodation is required for each individual applicant.
3. DOJ Signals Title I Requires Accessible Employment Websites. The DOJ has pushed the issue of website and apps accessibility even in cases arising under Title I of the ADA.
- a. *EXAMPLE: United States v. Florida State University*, No. 205-17-13 (settled on June 5, 2014). Action brought against FSU under Title I of the ADA, alleging that the FSU Police Department’s online application form asked questions about a past or present disability and other medical conditions in violation of the ADA. Notably, the 2014 settlement included a provision requiring the FSU Police Department website and apps to conform to the WCAG 2.0 technical standards. The DOJ stated that this settlement agreement “ensures that people with disabilities will have an equal opportunity to compete for jobs in the FSU Police Department. . . . The Justice Department is committed to knocking down employment barriers for people with disabilities, and we commend the FSU for its cooperation and continuing efforts to improve accessibility for all job applicants.”
  - b. *Takeaway and Implications*. Where an employer utilizes its website to advertise or promote employment opportunities and solicit and receive application materials, a disabled job applicant could bring a Title I claim against the employer if the website is not equally accessible to disabled applicants.

**D. Privacy Claims.** Websites and apps that discriminate against individuals with disabilities may also implicate state privacy claims. For instance, an entity may be liable if its website or apps’ privacy disclaimer or policy is not accessible to the disabled user who provides private or confidential information.

#### **IV. TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR IMPROVING WEBSITE ACCESSIBILITY**

- A. Website Audit.** Businesses and public entities should consider hiring a third-party digital consultant to conduct a thorough audit of their website and apps to determine what features might be insufficient and develop a plan for implementing necessary updates.
- B. Implement the Steps Outlined in the DOJ Settlements.** The DOJ settlements mentioned above include numerous measures to ensure compliance with federal provisions against disability discrimination, including the following:

1. Develop a website accessibility policy and accompany implementation and remediation plan.
2. Provide mandatory regular training on website accessibility for website and apps content personnel.
3. Designate an employee as web accessibility coordinator for the website(s) and/or apps.
4. Provide for accessibility testing of websites and apps.
5. Retain an independent website accessibility consultant, who will annually evaluate the accessibility of the website and apps.
6. Provide a notice on the website or app soliciting feedback from users regarding how website or apps accessibility can be improved.
7. Ensure that websites and apps conform to, at minimum, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0, which is discussed in more detail below.

**C. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (“WCAG”).** The WCAG contain an international standard for web accessibility, intended primarily for website developers. The Website Accessibility Initiative (“WAI”) of the World Wide Web Consortium (“W3C”) provides information about the analytical processes and the technology required to make websites accessible to individuals with disabilities.

1. The WAI issued the WCAG, which address website accessibility issues:
  - **Compatibility:** Maximize compatibility with assistive technology.
  - **Text alternatives:** Provide text alternatives for any non-text content (e.g., images) so that it can be changed into other forms, such as large print or Braille and accessed by individuals with disabilities.
  - **Video and audio content:** Provide alternatives (e.g., transcript) to video-only or audio-only content that present equivalent information, or link to textual information with comparable information.
  - **Time-based media:** Provide an alternative for time-based media (e.g., audio/video) that presents equivalent information, or link to textual information with comparable information for non-prerecorded media.
  - **Versatility:** Create content that can be presented in different ways without losing information or structure.
  - **Distinguishability:** Make it easier for users to see and hear content (e.g., separating foreground and background text, using adjustable font sizes).



- Keyboard accessibility: Make all functionality available from a keyboard.
  - Timed portions: Provide adequate time for users to access and use website functions, or provide a way for users to indicate they need more time.
  - Epilepsy/Seizures: Avoid design elements that are known to cause seizures (e.g., rapid flashing images).
2. The WCAG standard has three different levels: A, AA and AAA. A is the weakest level, while AAA is the strongest level. WCAG's AAA compliance correlates with complete Section 508 compliance.
  3. WCAG standards are likely to be incorporated into proposed ADA regulations at some point, as evidenced by the DOJ's 2010 ANPR (75 Fed. Reg. 43460), which sought comments on whether the DOJ should adopt the most recent version of WCAG standards (WCAG 2.0).
  4. Many settlement agreements generally define the appropriate level of website accessibility by referencing the WCAG 2.0.
  5. The Rehab Act included portions of the earliest version of the WCAG standards.

**D. Accessibility Statement.** One way to curtail lawsuits is to prominently include an accessibility statement on the website expressing that the entity creates and maintains a website which is accessible to people with disabilities, and provides contact information for any user with a concern or complaint regarding the website's accessibility.

**E. 24/7 Telephone Service.** Companies seeking to limit potential liability while working make their websites or apps accessible should, to the extent possible, ensure that all of the goods, services and information available on their websites can be accessed via 24/7 phone service.

**F. Other Considerations.**

1. Making a website accessible can be simple or complex, depending on many factors such as the type of content, the size and complexity of the website, and the development tools and environment. Moreover, fixing inaccessible websites can require significant effort, especially sites that were not originally "coded" properly with standard XHTML markup, and sites with certain types of content such as multimedia.
2. It is easier to implement accessibility features if they are planned from the beginning of the website development or redesign. Thus, businesses and public entities should consider enacting policies that require accessibility to be a design consideration from the outset.

3. Businesses and public entities should also consider enacting policies that call for periodic accessibility testing to ensure their websites are still accessible.

## **DISCLAIMER**

The information provided in these materials was accurate at the time written. The Sass Law Firm makes no assurance that the laws, statutes, rules, regulations or ordinances referenced herein have not been changed, amended or rescinded. Additionally, relevant new case law may have been recently published.

These materials are being made available for informational purposes only and are not to be relied upon as legal advice.

If you have an employment law question,  
we urge you to seek legal counsel.

Thank you.

**SASS LAW FIRM**