

March 5, 2001

TO: Office of Housing and Community Partnerships Award Recipients and Their Affiliates

FROM: Lisa Patt-McDaniel, Manager, Office of Housing and Community Partnerships

SUBJECT: Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities to Non-Housing Programs Funded by Community Development Block Grant Funds-- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans With Disabilities Act, and the Architectural Barriers Act

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## **I. Purpose**

The purpose of this Notice is to remind recipients of Federal funds under the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program of their obligation to comply with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, HUD's implementing regulations (24 CFR Part 8), the Americans with Disabilities Act, (ADA) and its implementing regulations, (28 CFR Parts 35, 36), and the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) and its implementing regulations (24 CFR Parts 40, 41) in connection with recipients' non-housing programs. This Notice describes key compliance elements for non-housing programs and facilities assisted under the CDBG programs. However, recipients should review the specific provisions of the ADA, Section 504, the ABA, and their implementing regulations in order to assure that their programs are administered in full compliance.

### Applicability

This Notice applies to all non-housing programs and facilities assisted with Community Development Block Grant Funds (e.g., public facilities and public improvements, commercial buildings, office buildings, and other non-residential buildings) and facilities in which CDBG activities are undertaken (e.g., public services). A separate Notice is being issued concerning Federal accessibility requirements for housing programs assisted by recipients of CDBG and HOME program funds.

## **II. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973**

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, provides "No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal

financial assistance...". HUD's regulations implementing the Section 504 requirements can be found at 24 CFR Part 8. Part 8 requires that recipients ensure that their programs are accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities. Part 8 also prohibits recipients from employment discrimination based upon disability.

The Section 504 regulations define "recipient" as any State or its political subdivision, any instrumentality of a State or its political subdivision, any public or private agency, institution organization, or other entity or any person to which Federal financial assistance is extended for any program or activity directly or through another recipient, including any successor, assignee, or transferee of a recipient, but excluding the ultimate beneficiary of the assistance. (24 CFR §8.3) For the purposes of Part 8, recipients include States and localities that are grantees and subgrantees under the CDBG program, their subrecipients, community-based development organizations, businesses, and any other entity that receives CDBG assistance, but not low and moderate income beneficiaries of the program. CDBG grantees are responsible for establishing policies and practices that they will use to monitor compliance of all covered programs, activities, or work performed by their subrecipients, contractors, subcontractors, management agents, etc.

#### Non-housing Programs

New Construction -- Part 8 requires that new non-housing facilities constructed by recipients of Federal financial assistance shall be designed and constructed to be readily accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities. (24 CFR §8.21(a))

Alterations to facilities -- Part 8 requires to the maximum extent feasible, that recipients make alterations to existing non-housing facilities to ensure that such facilities are readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities. An element of an existing non-housing facility need not be made accessible, if doing so, would impose undue financial and administrative burdens on the operation of the recipients program or activity. (24 CFR §8.21(b))

Existing non-housing facilities - A recipient is obligated to operate each non-housing program or activity so that, when viewed in its entirety, the program or activity is readily accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities. (24 CFR §8.21(c))

Recipients are not necessarily required to make each of their existing non-housing facilities accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities if when viewed in its entirety, the program or activity is readily accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities. 24 CFR §8.21(c)(1) Recipients are also not required to take any action that they can demonstrate would result in a fundamental alteration in the nature of its program or activity or cause an undue administrative and financial burden. However, recipients are still required to take other

actions that would not result in such alterations, but would nevertheless ensure that persons with disabilities receive the benefits and services of the program. (24 CFR §8.21(c)(iii))

Historic Preservation - Recipients are not required to take any actions that would result in a substantial impairment of significant historic features of an historic property. However, in such cases where a physical alteration is not required, the recipient is still obligated to use alternative means to achieve program accessibility, including using audio-visual materials and devices to depict those portions of an historic property that cannot be made accessible, assigning persons to guide persons with disabilities into or through portions of historic properties that cannot be made accessible, or otherwise adopting other innovative methods so that individuals with disabilities can still benefit from the program. (24 CFR §8.21(c)(2)(ii))

#### Accessibility Standards

Design, construction, or alteration of facilities in conformance with the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards (UFAS) is deemed to comply with the accessibility requirements for non-housing facilities. Recipients may depart from particular technical and scoping requirements of UFAS where substantially equivalent or greater accessibility and usability is provided. (24 CFR §8.32) For copies of UFAS, contact the HUD Distribution Center at 1-800-767-7468; deaf, hard of hearing, or speech-impaired persons may access this number via TTY by calling the Federal Information Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339.

Where a property is subject to more than one law or accessibility standard, it is necessary to comply with all applicable requirements. In some cases, it may be possible to do this by complying with the stricter requirement, however, it is also important to ensure that meeting the stricter requirement also meets both the scoping and technical requirements of overlapping laws or standards.

#### Employment

Section 504 also prohibits discrimination based upon disability in employment. (See 24 CFR Part 8, Subpart B.)

#### Section 504 Self Evaluations

The Section 504 regulations required recipients of Federal financial assistance to conduct a self-evaluation of their policies and practices to determine if they were consistent with the law's requirements. This self evaluation was to have been completed no later than July 11, 1989. Title II of the ADA imposed this requirement on all covered public entities. The ADA regulations required that ADA self evaluations be completed by January 26, 1993, although those public entities that had already performed a Section 504 self evaluation were only required to perform a self-evaluation on those policies and practices that had not been included in the Section 504 review.

The regulatory deadlines are long past. However, self-evaluation continues to be an excellent management tool for ensuring that a recipient's current policies and procedures comply with the requirements of Section 504 and the ADA.

Involving persons with disabilities in the self-evaluation process is very beneficial. This will assure the most meaningful result for both the recipient and for persons with disabilities who participate in the recipient's programs and activities. It is important to involve persons and/or organizations representing persons with disabilities, and agencies or other experts who work regularly with accessibility standards.

Important steps in conducting a self-evaluation and implementing its results include the following:

- Evaluate current policies and practices and analyze them to determine if they adversely affect the full participation of individuals with disabilities in its programs, activities and services. Be mindful of the fact that a policy or practice may appear neutral on its face, but may have a discriminatory effect on individuals with disabilities.
- Modify any policies and practices that are not or may not be in compliance with Section 504 or Title II and Title III of the ADA regulations. (See 24 CFR Part 8 and 28 CFR Parts 35, 36.)
- Take appropriate corrective steps to remedy those policies and practices which either are discriminatory or have a discriminatory effect. Develop policies and procedures by which persons with disabilities may request a modification of a physical barrier or a rule or practice that has the effect of limiting or excluding a person with a disability from the benefits of the program.
- Document the self-evaluation process and activities. The Department recommends that all recipients keep the self-evaluation on file for at least three years, including records of the individuals and organizations consulted, areas examined and problems identified, and document modifications and remedial steps, as an aid to meeting the requirement at 24 CFR Part 8.55.

The Department also recommends that recipients periodically update the self-evaluation, particularly, for example, if there have been changes in the programs and services of the agency. In addition, public entities covered by Title II of the ADA should review any policies and practices that were not included in their Section 504 self-evaluation and should modify discriminatory policies and practices accordingly.

### **III. The Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990**

The Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) guarantees equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in employment, public accommodations, transportation, State and local government services, and telecommunications. Unlike Section 504 which applies only to programs and activities receiving Federal financial assistance, the ADA applies even if no Federal financial assistance is given.

The U.S. Department of Justice enforces Titles I, II, and III of the ADA, although the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission investigates administrative complaints involving Title I.

Title I prohibits discrimination in employment based upon disability. The regulations implementing Title I are found at 29 CFR Part 1630. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) offers technical assistance on the ADA provisions applying to employment. These can be obtained at the EEOC web site [www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov), or by calling 1-800-669-3362 (voice) and 1-800-800-3302 (TTY).

Title II prohibits discrimination based on disability by State and local governments. Title II essentially extended the Section 504 requirements to services, programs, and activities provided by States, local governments and other entities that do not receive Federal financial assistance from HUD or another Federal agency. CDBG grantees are covered by both Title II and Section 504. The Department of Justice Title II regulations are found at 28 CFR Part 35.

Title II also requires that facilities that are newly constructed or altered, by, on behalf of, or for use of a public entity, be designed and constructed in a manner that makes the facility readily accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities. (28 CFR §35.151(a) and (b)) Facilities constructed or altered in conformance with either UFAS or the ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities (ADAAG) (Appendix A to 28 CFR Part 36) shall be deemed to comply with the Title II Accessibility requirements, except that the elevator exemption contained at section 4.1.3(5) and section 4.1.6(1)(j) of ADAAG shall not apply. (28 CFR §35.151(c))

Title II specifically requires that all newly constructed or altered streets, roads, and highways and pedestrian walkways must contain curb ramps or other sloped areas at any intersection having curbs or other barriers to entry from a street level or pedestrian walkway and that all newly constructed or altered street level pedestrian walkways must have curb ramps at intersections. Newly constructed or altered street level pedestrian walkways must contain curb ramps or other sloped areas at intersections to streets, roads, or highways. (28 CFR §35.151(e))

The Title II regulations required that by January 26, 1993, public entities (State or local governments) conduct a self-evaluation to review their current policies and practices to identify and correct any

requirements that were not consistent with the regulation. Public entities that employed more than 50 persons were required to maintain their self-evaluations on file and make it available for three years. If a public entity had already completed a self-evaluation under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, then the ADA only required it to do a self-evaluation of those policies and practices that were not included in the previous self-evaluation. (28 CFR §35.105)

The Department of Justice offers technical assistance on Title II through its web page at [www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/taprogram.htm](http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/taprogram.htm), and through its ADA Information Line, at (202) 514-0301 (voice and (202) 514-0383 (TTY)). The Department of Justice's technical assistance materials include among others, the Title II Technical Assistance Manual with Yearly Supplements, the ADA guide for Small Towns, and an ADA Guide entitled The ADA and City Governments: Common Problems.

Title III prohibits discrimination based upon disability in places of public accommodation (businesses and non-profit agencies that serve the public) and "commercial facilities (other businesses). It applies regardless of whether the public accommodation or commercial facility is operated by a private or public entity, or by a for profit or not for profit business. The Department of Justice Title III regulations are found at 28 CFR Part 36. The Department of Justice also offers technical assistance concerning Title III through the web page cited above and the ADA Hotline cited above.

#### **IV. The Architectural Barriers Act of 1968**

The Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 (ABA) (42 U.S.C. §4151-4157) requires that certain buildings financed with Federal funds must be designed, constructed, or altered in accordance with standards that ensure accessibility for persons with physical disabilities. The ABA covers any building or facility financed in whole or in part with Federal funds, except privately-owned residential structures. Covered buildings and facilities designed, constructed, or altered with CDBG funds are subject to the ABA and must comply with the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards (UFAS). (24 CFR 570.614) In practice, buildings built to meet the requirements of Section 504 and the ADA, will conform to the requirements of the ABA.

#### **V. HUD Resources Available Concerning Section 504**

Further information concerning compliance with Section 504 may be obtained through the HUD web page (<http://www.hud.gov/fhe/504/sect504.html>). Additional assistance and information may be obtained by contacting the local Department of Housing and Urban Development Offices of Community Planning and Development (CPD) at (614) 469-5737, Extension 8240 and Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO) at (614) 469-5737 Extension 8170 or by contacting **Joyce Hill**, OHCP Civil Rights Specialist, at (614) 466-2285.