

Freedom Initiative of 1998

“Section 508 was enacted to eliminate barriers in information technology”

“Agencies must give persons with disabilities equal public access to information”

Fulfilling America’s Promise to Americans with Disabilities

Disability is not the experience of a minority of Americans. Rather, it is an experience that will touch most Americans at some point during their lives.

Today, there are over 54 million Americans with disabilities, a full 20 percent of the U.S. population. Almost half of these individuals have a severe disability, affecting their ability to see, hear, walk, or perform other basic functions of life. In addition, there are over 25 million family caregivers and millions more who provide aid and assistance to people with disabilities.

Sixteen years ago, Congress passed and President George Bush signed one of the most significant civil rights laws since the Civil Rights Act of 1964 – the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In doing so, America opened its door to a new age for people with disabilities. Nine-years ago, amendments to Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 were enacted ensuring that the Federal Government would purchase electronic and information technology which is open and accessible for people with disabilities.

Although progress has been made over the years to improve access to employment, public accommodations, commercial facilities, information technology, telecommunications services, housing, schools, and polling places, significant challenges remain for Americans with disabilities in realizing the dream of equal access to full participation in American society. Indeed, the Harris surveys by the National Organization on Disability and numerous other studies have highlighted these persistent obstacles.

Americans with disabilities have a lower level of educational attainment than those without disabilities:

- One out of five adults with disabilities has not graduated from high school, compared to less than one of ten adults without disabilities.
- National graduation rates for students who receive special education and related services have stagnated at 27 percent for the past three years, while rates are 75 percent for students who do not rely on special education.

Americans with disabilities are poorer and more likely to be unemployed than those without disabilities:

- In 1997, over 33% of adults with disabilities lived in a household with an annual income of less than \$15,000, compared to only 12 percent of those without disabilities.
- Unemployment rates for working-age adults with disabilities have hovered at the 70 percent level for at least the past 12 years, while rates are significantly lower for working-age adults without disabilities.

Too many Americans with disabilities remain outside the economic and social mainstream of American life:

- 71% of people without disabilities own homes, but fewer than 10% of those with disabilities do.
- Computer usage and Internet access for people with disabilities is half that of people without disabilities.
- People with disabilities vote at a rate that is 20 percent below voters without disabilities. In local areas, disability issues seldom surface in election campaigns, and inaccessible polling places often discourage citizens with disabilities from voting.

People with disabilities want to be employed, educated, and participating, citizens living in the community. In today's global new economy, America must be able to draw on the talents and creativity of all its citizens.

The Administration will work to ensure that all Americans have the opportunity to learn and develop skills, engage in productive work, choose where to live and participate in community life. The President's "New Freedom Initiative" represents an important step in achieving these goals. It will expand research in and access to assistive and universally designed technologies, further integrate Americans with disabilities into the workforce and help remove barriers to participation in community life.



753 Jewel Court, Camarillo, California 93010.P: (805)988-6533 F: (805)988-6534
Web: www.glenmccintyre.com E-mail: glen@glenmccintyre.com