



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

August 22, 2014

The Honorable Tom Harkin
Chairman
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
Committee
428 Senate Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Ranking Member
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
Committee
428 Senate Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Transmitted via email to HEAA2014@help.senate.gov

Dear Chairman Harkin and Ranking Member Alexander:

On behalf of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) Technology and Telecommunications Task Force, we would like thank you for the opportunity to offer the following recommendations as you take on reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act*. The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities is a coalition of more than 100 national disability organizations working together to advocate for national public policy that ensures the self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration, and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society. The Telecommunications and Technology Task Force focuses on ensuring national policy on matters of telecommunications and technology, including assistive technology, helps move society toward our ultimate goal of full inclusion of all people with a disability.

The CCD Technology and Telecommunications Task Force requests that changes to the Higher Education Act embrace the tenets of the Technology, Equality and Accessibility in College and Higher Education Act or the TEACH Act. The TEACH Act directs the United States Access Board to develop accessibility guidelines for electronic instructional materials and related information technologies used in institutions of higher education (IHEs).

Technology is the key to providing equal access for students with disabilities. Unfortunately, most university websites, digital books, PDFs, learning management systems, lab software and online research journals are inaccessible to students with print disabilities. Federal law mandates equal access, but schools do not know what accessibility looks like or what to demand from manufacturers and developers. While the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice issued guidance to all institutions of higher education explaining their legal obligation to use accessible technology, schools are still in need of guidelines or some type of technical criteria to provide direction for what this should look like. The TEACH Act guidelines will help schools identify accessibility and know what to demand from vendors. This will stimulate the creation of a viable digital marketplace, facilitate compliance with federal law, and make it easier for blind students to access critical course material.

Thank you for your consideration of these views. . If you have any questions, please feel free to contact one of the CCD Technology and Telecommunications Task Force Co-Chairs: Eric Buehlmann,

eric.buehlmann@ndrn.org; Mark Richert, 4justice@concentric.net; Audrey Busch, audrey.busch@ataporg.org; Theresa Morgan, Theresa.Morgan@PPSV.com; or Michael Brogioli, mbrogioli@resna.org.

Sincerely,

Eric Buehlmann, National Disability Rights Network

Mark Richert, American Foundation for the Blind

Audrey Busch, Association for Assistive Technology Act Programs

Theresa Morgan, Perkins

Michael Brogioli, Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America