



PUBLIC NOTICE

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COMMISSION ANNOUNCES ENTITIES CERTIFIED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE NATIONAL DEAF-BLIND EQUIPMENT DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM FOR EIGHT ADDITIONAL STATES AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

CG Docket No. 10-210

By this Public Notice, the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau (CGB) of the Federal Communications Commission (Commission) certifies the following entities to administer the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program (NDBEDP): for Alabama, the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind; for Alaska, Assistive Technology of Alaska; for California, the Lighthouse for the Blind and Visually Impaired; for Delaware, the University of Delaware – Center for Disabilities Studies; for the District of Columbia, the Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind; for Illinois, The Chicago Lighthouse Serving the Blind, Visually Impaired, Disabled and Veteran Communities; for Missouri, Missouri Assistive Technology; for Nebraska, the Nebraska Assistive Technology Partnership; and, for Pennsylvania, the Institute on Disabilities – Temple University. These certifications shall become effective July 1, 2017.¹

Background. Under the NDBEDP, also known as “iCanConnect,” the Commission may provide up to \$10 million annually from the Interstate Telecommunications Relay Service Fund (TRS Fund) to support local programs that distribute equipment to eligible low-income individuals who are deaf-blind, so that these individuals can access telecommunications service, Internet access service, and advanced communications services.² Since 2012, the Commission has operated the NDBEDP as a pilot program through the certification and oversight of 53 entities – one for each state, plus the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.³ This pilot program will end on June 30, 2017,⁴ and the

¹ CGB has been, and will continue, reviewing certification applications and announcing entities selected for certification for each state on a rolling basis.

² Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010 (CVAA), Pub. L. No. 111-260, 124 Stat. 2751; Pub. L. 111-265, 124 Stat. 2795 (technical corrections to the CVAA). Section 105 of the CVAA added section 719 to the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, which is codified at 47 U.S.C. § 620.

³ See *Implementation of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010, Section 105, Relay Services for Deaf-Blind Individuals*, Report and Order, 26 FCC Rcd 5640 (2011) (*NDBEDP Pilot Program Order*); *Commission Announces Launch of the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program*, Public Notice, 27 FCC Rcd 7403 (CGB 2012); see also 47 CFR § 64.610(a)-(k).

⁴ See *Implementation of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010, Section 105, Relay Services for Deaf-Blind Individuals*, Order, 31 FCC Rcd 6149 (2016).

NDBEDP will become a permanent program on July 1, 2017.⁵ In accordance with the *NDBEDP Permanent Program Order*, CGB must certify one entity for each state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, as the sole entity for that jurisdiction to receive reimbursement for NDBEDP activities from the TRS Fund.⁶

On February 7, 2017, CGB announced that it would accept applications until April 7, 2017, from entities that were interested in receiving Commission certification to participate in the permanent NDBEDP.⁷ In that announcement, CGB identified the eight qualifications for certification that are required for the permanent NDBEDP.⁸ The first seven of these apply to all applicants and require the following: expertise in the field of deaf-blindness, the ability to communicate effectively with people who are deaf-blind, sufficient staffing and facilities, experience with equipment distribution, experience training consumers how to use the distributed equipment, familiarity with covered services, and administrative and financial management experience.⁹ The eighth qualification, which applies only to applicants that participated in the pilot program that are seeking renewal of their existing certifications, requires the ability to provide equipment and related services in compliance with the Commission's rules, as demonstrated by the applicant's past performance.¹⁰ In addition, applicants for certification must disclose actual or potential conflicts of interest.¹¹

CGB reviewed a single application for eight of the nine jurisdictions that are the subject of this public notice.¹² Each of these eight entities are currently certified under the NDBEDP pilot program to serve their jurisdictions, namely, Alabama, Alaska, California, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Illinois, Missouri, and Nebraska. Following its review of these applications, CGB is satisfied that each of the applicants for these eight jurisdictions meets the criteria contained in the Commission's rules to receive certification under the permanent NDBEDP. For example, as evidenced in their applications, through the performance of their NDBEDP-related activities under the pilot program and other aspects of their enterprises that are independent of the NDBEDP, these entities have demonstrated extensive experience in providing accessible services in a manner that shows cultural awareness of the deaf-blind community and its communication needs; considerable expertise in the communications technology used by individuals who are deaf-blind; the administrative and financial management capability to manage state programs under the NDBEDP; sufficient staffing to manage these state programs; and a strong familiarity with the Commission's rules governing this program. Furthermore, as the NDBEDP certified programs for these jurisdictions, these entities will work in partnership with local agencies to meet the

⁵ See *Implementation of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010, Section 105, Relay Services for Deaf-Blind Individuals*, Report and Order, 31 FCC Rcd 9178, 9199, para 51 (2016) (*NDBEDP Permanent Program Order*); see also 47 CFR §§ 64.6201-64.6219.

⁶ 47 CFR § 64.6207; see also *NDBEDP Permanent Program Order*, 31 FCC Rcd at 9184, para. 9. Collectively, the entities selected to participate in the NDBEDP are referred to herein as "certified programs" or "state programs."

⁷ *FCC Announces 60-day Period to Apply for Certification to Participate in the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program*, Public Notice, 32 FCC Rcd 1123 (2017).

⁸ *Id.*, 32 FCC Rcd at 1124-26.

⁹ 47 CFR § 64.6207(c)(1)-(7).

¹⁰ 47 CFR § 64.6207(c)(8).

¹¹ 47 CFR § 64.6207(d)(1); see also *NDBEDP Permanent Program Order*, 31 FCC Rcd at 9190, paras. 23-24.

¹² See *FCC Announces Applicants for Certification to Participate in the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program*, CG Docket No. 10-210, Public Notice, DA 17-392 (CGB Apr. 25, 2017).

needs of the deaf-blind population throughout these jurisdictions. Accordingly, CGB certifies these entities to participate in the permanent NDBEDP, effective July 1, 2017, for a period of five years.¹³

Two entities submitted applications to administer the NDBEDP for Pennsylvania. The first of these, the Institute on Disabilities – Temple University (the Institute), has been certified to serve Pennsylvania under the NDBEDP pilot program since 2012. The Institute reports that in this role, over the past five years, it has distributed equipment to low-income individuals who are deaf-blind throughout its state, providing more than 1,200 hours of services to these individuals, including individualized assessments, equipment installation, and training on how to use the equipment distributed.¹⁴ To administer the NDBEDP effectively and comprehensively, the Institute states that it has contracted with agencies and individuals, and established partnerships with entities such as the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services, Blind and Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh, the Pennsylvania Deaf-Blind Project, and Pennsylvania’s Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. The Institute explains that it also has utilized its statewide network of Assistive Technology Resource Centers to help meet the needs of its residents and its obligations as a certified entity under the NDBEDP.

The second applicant is the Center for Independent Living of Central Pennsylvania (CILCP), a non-profit organization that reports that it has been motivating and supporting people with disabilities for the past 28 years.¹⁵ CILCP explains that, for the past three years, it has also managed a statewide support service provider program through its Deafblind Living Well Services (DBLWS) program. CILCP further notes that its DBLWS program manager is deaf-blind, has experience in the use of accessible communications technologies, and has participated in train-the-trainer activities. To administer the NDBEDP, CILCP states that it would contract with individuals, and collaborate with its network of partnerships with agencies and independent contractors serving individuals who are deaf-blind throughout the state, as well as the network of 17 Centers for Independent Living in Pennsylvania.

Based on the information provided, we conclude that, while CILCP meets or is capable of meeting the qualifying criteria through collaboration with other entities, the Institute’s demonstrated experience in the distribution of communications equipment, its skills in training consumers on the use of such equipment, and its provision of related services since the inception of the NDBEDP pilot program make it more qualified to perform these functions as this program transitions to its permanent status. Through the NDBEDP and the Institute’s other programs – such as the Pennsylvania Initiative on Assistive Technology, which has been in operation since 1992 and has administered Pennsylvania’s Telecommunications Device Distribution Program since 2007 – the Institute has acquired extensive experience and the management, administrative, and technical expertise necessary to effectively operate Pennsylvania’s equipment distribution program. We believe that the proficiency gained through these experiences, which have taken place over the course of a decade, make it uniquely qualified to ensure the success of the permanent NDBEDP for the residents of Pennsylvania. For these reasons, although CILCP’s application evidences strong qualifications with respect to expertise in the field of deaf-blindness, CGB has determined that the Institute, in addition to meeting all of the Commission’s criteria for certification, is better suited than CILCP to administer this program for Pennsylvania at this time.

¹³ 47 CFR § 64.6207(e). A program may apply for renewal of its certification by filing a new application at least one year prior to the expiration of the certification period. *Id.*

¹⁴ Institute on Disabilities, Pennsylvania Application for NDBEDP Certification at 1 (Apr. 7, 2017).

¹⁵ CILCP, Application to Participate in the NDBEDP at 1 (Apr. 3, 2017).

Accordingly, CGB certifies the Institute to participate in the NDBEDP, effective July 1, 2017, for a period of five years.¹⁶

As has been the case in the pilot program, each entity selected will have full responsibility for distributing equipment and providing related services, including outreach, assessments, installation, and training, in their state(s), either directly or through collaboration, partnership, or contract with other individuals or entities in-state or out-of-state, including other NDBEDP certified programs.¹⁷ All certified programs must further comply with all of the Commission's NDBEDP rules pertaining to their participation in this program, including requirements designed to ensure the continuation of NDBEDP operations in their jurisdictions if, in the future, they relinquish or do not renew their certifications or otherwise exit the program.¹⁸

ACCESSIBLE FORMATS: To request materials in accessible formats for people with disabilities (Braille, large print, electronic files, audio format), send an e-mail to fcc504@fcc.gov or call the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau at 202-418-0530 (voice), 202-418-0432 (TTY).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT: Jackie Ellington, Disability Rights Office, Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, 202-418-1153, e-mail Jackie.Ellington@fcc.gov; or Rosaline Crawford, Disability Rights Office, Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, 202-418-2075, e-mail Rosaline.Crawford@fcc.gov.

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¹⁶ 47 CFR § 64.6207(e).

¹⁷ 47 CFR § 64.6207.

¹⁸ 47 CFR §§ 64.6201-64.6219; *see also* *NDBEDP Permanent Program Order*, 31 FCC Rcd at 9197, paras. 44-45, 9278-87, Appendix D (setting out the NDBEDP permanent program rules).