



NEWS

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D. C. 20554

News Media Information 202 / 418-0500
Internet: <http://www.fcc.gov>
TTY: 1-888-835-5322

This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action.
See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).

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News Media Contact:
Rosemary Kimball at (202) 418-0511
e-mail: rosemary.kimball@fcc.gov

FCC ACTS TO ENSURE THAT DEAF-BLIND INDIVIDUALS HAVE ACCESS TO 21st CENTURY COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGIES

Washington, D.C. – Today, the Commission established a National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program (NDBEDP) to enable low-income individuals who are deaf-blind to access 21st Century communications services. The pilot program will help ensure that qualified individuals have access to the Internet, and advanced communications, including interexchange services and advanced telecommunications and information services.

This action implements a provision of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010 (CVAA). The CVAA allocated \$10 million annually from the Interstate Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) Fund for this nationwide equipment distribution effort. The Commission concluded that the best approach would be to establish a two-year pilot program, with the option of extending this for a third year, so that the Commission can assess the most efficient and effective method of administering the NDBEDP on a permanent basis. Under the NDBEDP pilot program, the Commission will certify and provide funding to one entity in each state to distribute equipment to low-income individuals who are deaf-blind.

The Commission will make the full amount of the authorized funding, \$10 million, available for each year of the pilot program. Of this amount, the Commission will set aside up to \$500,000 per year for national outreach efforts. Each state will initially receive a minimum initial funding allocation of \$50,000, with the balance of the available funds allocated in proportion to each state's population. Certified programs will have to submit documentation to support claims for reimbursement for NDBEDP equipment and related services, up to each state's funding allocation. Certified programs must submit reports on their activities and expenses every six months, disclose potential conflicts of interest, and conduct annual independent audits

The Commission adopted the following rules and policies for the NDBEDP pilot program:

- **Certified Programs:** Entities must apply for certification to receive funding support under the NDBEDP pilot program within 60 days of the effective date of the rules. The Commission will certify only one entity for each state.
- **Consumer Eligibility:** "Individuals who are deaf-blind," as defined in the Helen Keller National Center Act, are eligible to apply for equipment. Because of the unusually high medical and disability-related costs incurred by these individuals, the Order sets a low-income eligibility threshold of 400% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

- Equipment: The Order permits distribution of specialized and off-the-shelf equipment, separately or in combination, as long as it meets the needs of the deaf-blind individual and makes communications services covered under the CVAA accessible. The reasonable costs of the equipment distributed, warranties, maintenance, repairs, and refurbishing will be covered.
- Related Services: The reasonable costs of state and local outreach efforts, individual assessments of a deaf-blind person's communications equipment needs, equipment installation, and individualized training of consumers on how to use the equipment will also be covered under the NDBEDP.

Action by the Commission, April 4, 2011, by Report and Order (FCC 11-56). Chairman Genachowski, and Commissioners Copps, McDowell, Clyburn and Baker. Separate Statement issued by Commissioner Copps.

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CG Docket No. 10-210.

For further information, contact Karen Peltz Strauss at (202) 418-2388 or Rosaline Crawford at (202) 418-2075 of the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau.

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