

Executive Summary

A Progress Report on Fulfilling America's Promise to Americans with Disabilities

Introduction

Many of the 54 million Americans with disabilities are deprived of their independence due to needless barriers. On February 1, 2001, President Bush announced his New Freedom Initiative to promote the full participation of people with disabilities in all areas of society by increasing access to assistive and universally designed technologies, expanding educational and employment opportunities, and promoting full access to community life. This report details the progress the Administration has made to implement the New Freedom Initiative goal – to ensure full integration of people with disabilities in American society.

Increasing Access Through Technology

The President promised full implementation of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, which requires that all Federal government electronic and information technologies be accessible to individuals with disabilities. In response, the Administration:

- Expedited Section 508 implementation; and
- Produced extensive technical guidance and training materials that will be helpful not only to Federal agencies in complying with Section 508, but also to others interested in accessible technologies, such as private businesses, state and local governments, manufacturers and vendors, and individuals with disabilities.

The President secured \$65 million for Fiscal Year (FY) 2002 for the Department of Education to:

- Jumpstart research in the area of assistive and universally designed technologies at centers that conduct advanced research in the field; and
- Support the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research in its work to coordinate Federal disability research programs, to assist small businesses in the development and transfer of new technologies, and to award matching grants to states to help persons with disabilities purchase assistive technologies through low interest loans and other means.

Expanding Educational Opportunities for Youth with Disabilities

The President is determined to ensure that children with disabilities receive appropriate educational opportunities and that youth receive support to transition from school to employment. To achieve these objectives, the President:

- Requested the largest increases of any President in history for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B State Grants program in his FY 2002 and FY 2003 budgets;
- Signed legislation increasing funding for the IDEA Part B State Grants program by \$1.2 billion in FY 2002;
- Established a comprehensive reading program for students, including those with disabilities, as well as programs to ensure that children with the most severe reading disabilities learn to read; and
- Created a Presidential Commission on Excellence in Special Education.

Integrating Americans with Disabilities Into the Workforce

To break down barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities, the President has:

- Promoted swift implementation of the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act, which provides incentives to work for more than 7.5 million Americans receiving benefits under Federal disability programs;
- Obtained \$20 million for matching grants to states to help people with disabilities buy equipment necessary for telecommuting to work;
- Supported measures that would provide tax incentives for company purchases of equipment that allow an employee to work from home;
- Continued his commitment to vigorous enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); and
- Requested an increase of \$165 million in funding and performance-based incentive grants for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program in the FY 2003 budget.

Promoting Full Access to Community Life

To increase homeownership rates for people with disabilities, the President supported a program that permits people with disabilities to use Section 8 rent subsidy vouchers to make mortgage payments to buy their own homes. To increase the availability of accessible and affordable housing for individuals with disabilities, the Administration has:

- Recently awarded a major national education and outreach grant to help communities ensure that more apartments and condominiums are built to be accessible to people with disabilities; and
- Launched a program through the Department of Housing and Urban Development to provide training and technical assistance to the building industry on the Fair Housing Act's accessible design and construction requirements.

To facilitate community living for people with disabilities, the President issued an Executive Order directing key Federal agencies to evaluate and recommend ways to expand community-