

SECTION 508 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT

Section 508 is part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which requires that electronic and information technology developed, procured, maintained, or used by the Federal government be accessible to people with disabilities. On August 7, 1998, President Clinton signed into law the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, which includes the Rehabilitation Act of 1998. Section 508 was originally added to the Rehabilitation Act in 1986; the 1998 amendments significantly expand and strengthen the technology access requirements in Section 508. The U.S. Access Board, an independent Federal agency devoted to accessibility for people with disabilities, issued new standards for electronic and information technology effective as of June 21, 2001.

Federal departments and agencies must comply with Section 508. It does not regulate the private sector and does not apply directly to recipients of Federal funds. However, states may be affected as a result of the U.S. Department of Education's requirement that states receiving funds under the Assistive Technology Act of 1998, Title I, such as Oklahoma ABLÉ Tech, must agree to comply with the provisions of Section 508. Governor Keating signed a letter of "Assurance Regarding Compliance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as Amended" on April 9, 1997.

The 508 Standards provide criteria specific to various types of technologies, including: software applications and operating systems; web-based information or applications; telecommunication products; video and multimedia products; self contained, closed products (information kiosks, calculators, and fax machines); and desktop and portable computers.

People are asking how these Standards apply to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, or Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These are general anti-discrimination laws that require program and architectural accessibility, which could include the provision of accessible information technology as a reasonable accommodation or as an auxiliary aid or service necessary for equal access. These access decisions are made for individuals on a case-by-case basis, whereas, Section 508 information technology access decisions are made by determining if products adhere to the Access Board Standards. The law directed the Access Board to develop access standards that are to become part of the Federal government's procurement's regulations.

FOR SECTION 508 TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CONTACT:

General Services Administration
Office of Information Technology
1800 F St. NW
Washington, DC 20405-0001
(202) 501-0202
<http://section508.gov/index.html>

Access Board
1331 F. Street NW, Suite 1000
Washington, DC 20004-1111
(202) 272-5434 OR (202) 272-5449 (TDD)
(800) 872-2253 OR (800) 993-2822 (TDD)
FAX: (202) 272-5447
www.access-board.gov