

that individuals with a disability receive the benefits and services of the program or activity.

(b) *Methods.* The Department may comply with the requirements of this section through such means as redesign of equipment, reassignment of services to accessible buildings, assignment of aides to beneficiaries, home visits, delivery of services at alternate accessible sites, alteration of existing facilities and construction of new facilities, use of accessible rolling stock, or any other methods that result in making its programs or activities readily accessible to and usable by individuals with a disability. The Department, in making alterations to existing buildings, shall meet accessibility requirements to the extent required by the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4151–4157), and any regulations implementing it. In choosing among available methods for meeting the requirements of this section, the Department shall give priority to those methods that offer programs and activities to qualified individuals with a disability in the most integrated setting appropriate.

(c) *Time period for compliance.* The Department shall comply with the obligations established under this section not later than May 5, 2003, except that where structural changes in facilities are undertaken, such changes shall be made not later than March 6, 2006, but in any event as expeditiously as possible. If a component within the Department has already complied with the accessibility requirements of a regulation implementing section 504, then the provisions of this paragraph shall apply only to facilities for that agency's programs and activities that were not previously made readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities in compliance with that regulation.

(d) *Transition plan.* In the event that structural changes to facilities will be undertaken to achieve program accessibility, the Department shall develop not later than September 8, 2003, a transition plan setting forth the steps necessary to complete such changes. The Department shall provide an opportunity to interested persons, including individuals with disabilities or or-

ganizations representing individuals with disabilities, to participate in the development of the transition plan by submitting comments (both telephonic and written). A copy of the transition plan shall be made available for public inspection. If a component of the Department has already complied with the transition plan requirement of a regulation implementing section 504, then the requirements of this paragraph shall apply only to the agency's facilities for programs and activities that were not included in the previous transition plan. The plan shall at a minimum:

(1) Identify physical obstacles in the Department's facilities that limit the physical accessibility of its programs or activities to individuals with disabilities;

(2) Describe in detail the methods that will be used to make the facilities accessible;

(3) Specify the schedule for taking the steps necessary to achieve compliance with this section and, if the time period of the transition plan is longer than one year, identify steps that will be taken during each year of the transition period; and

(4) Indicate the official responsible for implementation of the plan.

§ 15.51 Program accessibility; new construction and alterations.

Each building or part of a building that is constructed or altered by, on behalf of, or for the use of the Department shall be designed, constructed, or altered so as to be readily accessible to and usable by individuals with a disability. The definitions, requirements, and standards of the Architectural Barriers Act (42 U.S.C. 4151–4157), as established in 41 CFR 101–19.600 through 101–19.607 apply to buildings covered by this section.

§ 15.60 Communications.

(a) The Department shall take appropriate steps to effectively communicate with applicants, participants, personnel of other Federal entities, and members of the public.

(1) The Department shall furnish appropriate auxiliary aids where necessary to afford an individual with a

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disability an equal opportunity to participate in, and enjoy the benefits of, a program or activity conducted by the Department.

(i) In determining what type of auxiliary aid is necessary, the Department shall give primary consideration to the requests of the individual with a disability.

(ii) The Department need not provide individually prescribed devices, readers for personal use or study, or other devices of a personal nature to applicants or participants in programs.

(2) Where the Department communicates with applicants and beneficiaries by telephone, the Department shall use telecommunication devices for deaf persons (TTYs) or equally effective telecommunication systems to communicate with persons with impaired hearing.

(b) The Department shall make available to interested persons, including persons with impaired vision or hearing, information as to the existence and location of accessible services, activities, and facilities.

(c) The Department shall post notices at a primary entrance to each of its inaccessible facilities, directing users to an accessible facility, or to a location at which they can obtain information about accessible facilities. The international symbol for accessibility shall be used at each primary entrance of an accessible facility.

(d) This section does not require the Department to take any action that it can demonstrate would result in a fundamental alteration in the nature of a program or activity or in undue financial and administrative burdens.

(e) In those circumstances where Department personnel believe that the proposed action would fundamentally alter the program or activity or would result in undue financial and administrative burdens, the Department has the burden of proving that compliance with this section would result in such alteration or burdens. The decision that compliance would result in such alteration or burdens must be made by the Secretary of Homeland Security (or his or her designee) after considering all resources available for use in the funding and operation of the conducted program or activity and must be ac-

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companied by a written statement of the reasons for reaching that conclusion. If an action required to comply with this section would result in such an alteration or such burdens, the Department shall take any other action that would not result in such an alteration or such burdens but would nevertheless ensure that, to the maximum extent possible, individuals with a disability receive the benefits and services of the program or activity.

§ 15.70 Compliance procedures.

(a) Except as provided in paragraph (b) of this section, this section applies to all allegations of discrimination on the basis of disability in programs and activities conducted by the Department.

(b) The Department shall process complaints alleging violations of section 504 with respect to employment according to the procedures established by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 29 CFR part 1614.

(c) All other complaints alleging violations of section 504 may be sent to the Officer for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, Department of Homeland Security, Washington, DC 20528. The Officer for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties shall be responsible for coordinating implementation of this section.

(d)(1) Any person who believes that he or she has been subjected to discrimination prohibited by this part may by him or herself, or by his or her authorized representative, file a complaint. Any person who believes that any specific class of persons has been subjected to discrimination prohibited by this part and who is a member of that class or the authorized representative of a member of that class may file a complaint.

(2) The Department shall accept and investigate all complete complaints over which it has jurisdiction.

(3) All complete complaints must be filed within 180 days of the alleged act of discrimination. The Department may extend this time period for good cause.

(e) If the Department receives a complaint over which it does not have jurisdiction, it shall promptly notify the complainant and shall make reasonable efforts to refer the complaint to