

Overview

During October, lawmakers demonstrated ongoing interest in the area of emergency communications. A number of bills, if passed into law, could particularly affect people with disabilities. A series of related bills, most notably the **Kelsey Smith Act of 2009**, were introduced in the House and would require call information location as a crucial part of emergency services, as well as provide for training in this area. In both the House and the Senate, bills have been introduced to extend the Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant Program, which has examined issues related to disability access in the past. Finally, the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure's Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency management held a hearing that specifically examined disaster preparedness for vulnerable populations, including people with disabilities.

Meanwhile, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has continued its efforts to develop a National Broadband Plan (NBP). On October 20, 2009, it held a staff workshop on broadband access for people with disabilities, and on November 6, 2009, the Commission will hold a field hearing at Gallaudet University to also consider broadband access.

Legislative Activities

Emergency Responder Bills Introduced into the House

Rep. Dennis Moore (D-KS) (09/30/2009) introduced the **Kelsey Smith Act of 2009 [H.R. 3682]** into the House of Representatives. As noted in its full title, the bill is intended to “require telecommunications carriers to provide call location information to law enforcement agencies in emergency situations,” as well as “authorize education and training for State and local law enforcement agencies and officers with respect to the collection and use of call location information for emergency situations.” It would require telecommunications carriers to release call location information to emergency personnel, whether it be the police, dispatcher, ambulances or hospitals to respond more rapidly in life-threatening situations. Additionally, the Act would allow trainees to use the information for official training purposes.

The **Kelsey Smith Law Enforcement Training Grant Program Act [H.R. 3698]** is a related bill introduced by Rep. Jerry Moran (R-KS). This act focuses more specifically on the training aspect of Kelsey Smith Act of 2009. It would permit training facilities to access this information to train local and state law enforcement agencies and officers so that they may effectively communicate with telecommunications carriers during emergencies. Both bills were referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce in September.

[Source: Library of Congress]

Additional Information

- [Text of Kelsey Smith Act of 2009 \[H.R. 3682\]](http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c111:H.R.3682:)
[http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c111:H.R.3682:]
- [Text of Kelsey Smith Law Enforcement Training Grant Program Act \[H.R. 3698\]](http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c111:H.R.3698:)
[http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c111:H.R.3698:]

House Subcommittee Holds Hearing on Emergency Needs for People with Disabilities

October 20, 2009 – The House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure’s Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency management held a hearing entitled “Looking Out for the Very Young, Elderly, and Others with Special Needs: Lessons from Katrina and Other Major Disasters.” In addition to opening statements by Chairman James L. Oberstar (D-MN) and Subcommittee Chairwoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (Delegate, D-DC), the Subcommittee heard testimony from Tim Manning, Deputy Administrator of the National Preparedness Directorate of the Federal Emergency Management Authority (FEMA), Mark Shriver, Chairman of the National Commission on Children and Disasters, John Vaughn, Chairperson of the National Council on Disability (NCD), and Trevor Rigen, Senior Director of Direct Services of the American Red Cross.

Of particular interest, Vaughn pointed to the need for people with disabilities to be considered by authorities as active participants in the process of disaster and emergency planning. Of particular concern, he noted, are emergency warnings that are still inaccessible to people with disabilities. The fact that many individuals now receive much of their information through television has considerable import for television-relayed messages and broadcasts, many of which still fail to recognize the limitations and needs of viewers with disabilities.

[Source: House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure]

Additional Information:

- [Summary and Written Statements: "Lessons from Hurricane Katrina and Other Major Disasters"](#)

[<http://transportation.house.gov/hearings/hearingDetail.aspx?NewsID=1030>]

Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant Program Bill Clears Committee

October 8, 2009 – The House Commerce Committee’s Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, and the Internet approved a bill [**H.R. 3633**] that would extend until the end of fiscal year 2012 the Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant Program authorized under the **Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act of 2005 [47 U.S.C. 309]**. The grant program has covered governance, planning, training and exercise, and equipment funding to States, Territories, and local and tribal governments to carry out initiatives to improve interoperable emergency communications, including communications in collective response to natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and other man-made disasters. As part of its efforts in the past, the grant program has considered the emergency communication needs of people with disabilities.

H.R. 3633 was introduced by Rep. Jane Harman (D-CA) on September 23, 2009. The committee approved the bill with a unanimous voice vote. It will next proceed to the full House for a vote. A similar bill, **S. 1694**, was introduced by Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-WV) and Sen. Kay Hutchison (R-TX) in September.

[Source: Library of Congress]

Additional Information

- [Text of H.R. 3633: Bill to extend the Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant Program](#)

[<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c111:H.R.3633:>]

Regulatory Activities

Broadband Access for People with Disabilities Focus of FCC Staff Workshop

October 20, 2009 – The FCC held a daylong staff workshop to address issues of broadband accessibility for people with disabilities as part of the Commission’s ongoing efforts to develop a National Broadband Plan (NBP). Most broadly, the workshop concerned itself with accessibility and affordability barriers faced by people with disabilities, opportunities that broadband technologies and services might present to these Americans, and the policy issues surrounding barriers and opportunities.

The Workshop consisted of four panels. The first engaged the issue of how stakeholders could leverage federal and state resources to help make broadband accessible and, especially, affordable for individuals with disabilities. The second panel considered the issue of barriers more broadly. A national agenda for broadband access by people with disabilities was the focus of the third panel, which also touched on issues of emergency communications. The fourth panel addressed the technological issues and solutions specific to individuals with disabilities. Finally, the day concluded with a two-and-a-half hour policy roundtable, in which over 20 leaders in the field shared their insights on policy barriers and opportunities.

[Source: FCC]

Additional Information:

- [Agenda: FCC Staff Workshop on Broadband Access for People with Disabilities \(MS Word and PDF available\)](#)

[http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-249018A1.txt]

Transportation Access Focus of Federal Government’s “United We Ride” Initiative

November 2, 2009 – The Federal Interagency Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility (CCAM) has launched a two-week dialogue entitled “United We Ride” (UWR) and asks the public to comment on issues relevant to transportation access for people with disabilities, older Americans, and individuals with limited incomes. The CCAM consists of 11 federal departments and agencies, and UWR represents an attempt by policymakers to create an interactive, virtual town hall meeting to engage these issues.

The stated problem on which CCAM seeks comment and feedback: “For people who cannot drive or afford an automobile, access to transportation services is one of the major barriers of community based living. Too often, the lack of transportation resources prevents individuals from being able to get to work, seek medical care, attend important events, and participate in recreational activities.” Between November 2 and November 13, 2009, the public will be asked to submit comments to

address these problems at the UWR website, and they'll have the opportunity to read others' ideas and vote on them. Registration is required to take part, but users will receive feedback from policymakers after the dialogue has ended.

[Source: CCAM]

Additional Information:

- ["United We Ride": CCAM Dialogue on Transportation Access, Nov. 2-13, 2009 \(Registration Required\)](#)

[<http://www.uwrdialogue.org>]

Other Items of Interest

AT&T Develops Real-Time Interface to Enhance Calls for Users with Hearing Impairments

September 28, 2009 – AT&T, in partnership with AOL, has developed a new system to enhance calling for users with hearing and speech impairments. The AT&T IM Relay service has been improved with the addition of AT&T Real Time IM, which improves the speed of text-mediated calling and enhances communication.

Users log in to a specialized AIM interface that works with an Internet connection on a PC and on many wireless devices. A specially trained relay operator reads IMs to hearing callers and types IMs that are displayed in real-time to the end user. The new service is offered at no additional charge to customers who register with AT&T Relay Services. With the new real time IM feature, instead of waiting for the relay operator to type a full phrase or sentence, IM users can see the text messages they are receiving, word-by-word as they are typed -- making conversations feel more like calls experienced by hearing customers.

[Sources: AT&T and PRNewswire]

Additional Information

- [News Story: AT&T Premieres Real Time IM Relay for Customers](#)

[<http://sev.prnewswire.com/computer-electronics/20090928/CG8246328092009-1.html>]

Universal Commits to Including Descriptive Video Service on DVD and Blu-Ray

October 23, 2009 - Universal Pictures Home Entertainment recently committed to including the Descriptive Video Service (DVS) track created for theatrical release of films on the DVD and Blu-Ray versions of those films. The Media Access Group at WGBH, which creates both the closed captioning and DVS via its Motion Picture Access (MoPix) effort, recently acknowledged Universal Pictures for its dedication to this endeavor, and the filmmaker joins Sony Pictures, which also made a similar

announcement several weeks earlier. WGBH has noted that any comments and feedback it receives are shared with these studios and will also be used to convince additional studios' home entertainment divisions to include DVS on its DVD releases. It also hopes that the use of DVS will eventually extend to downloads and online streaming of video content.

[Source: WGBH]

Additional Information

- [Media Access Group at WGBH](http://main.wgbh.org/wgbh.pages/mag)
[<http://main.wgbh.org/wgbh.pages/mag>]

Wireless RERC Updates

Georgia Tech's Sonification Lab - Technology Demonstration at CVI-Atlanta

November 11, 2009 - Georgia Tech's Sonification Lab and the Wireless RERC will be sponsoring and hosting a demonstration of assistive technology solutions for the visually impaired at the Center for the Visually Impaired (CVI) in Atlanta. The demonstration will take place at the Center from 11:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., on November 11, 2009. For more information, please contact John Morris at john_morris@shepherd.org or 404-367-1348.

Hearing Aid Compatibility Videos: Choosing a Cell Phone that Works For You

March 1, 2009 - The Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Wireless Technologies (Wireless RERC) and CTIA - The Wireless Association® announced the release of a new consumer education video series, "Hearing Aid Compatibility: Choosing a Cell Phone That Works For You." Available for viewing at [<http://www.AccessWireless.org>], these videos will help wireless consumers who use hearing aids to identify and choose a hearing aid-compatible (HAC) wireless device that meets their needs.

Each video outlines the key information consumers need to choose a HAC wireless device. The first segment presents general HAC and wireless device information as told by a certified audiologist. The second segment demonstrates a suggested "try and buy" process between a customer representative and a consumer at an actual wireless carrier's retail store.

CTIA's [AccessWireless.org](http://www.AccessWireless.org) hosts the video series, which is accessible to visitors through captioning, audio description and both high- and low-resolution versions. This video series may also be used by wireless carriers as a training tool for sales and customer support staff. The video series was produced by the Wireless RERC with the support of the Alliance for Telecommunications Industry Solutions (ATIS), AT&T, Audiological Consultants of Atlanta, CTIA - The Wireless Association®,

Gallaudet University's Technology Access Program, the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA), Nokia, Research In Motion (BlackBerry ®), Samsung and T-Mobile USA, Inc.

Additional Information:

- [Hearing Aid Compatibility Videos: Choosing a Cell Phone that Works for You](http://www.accesswireless.org/hearingaid/hac_video.cfm)
[http://www.accesswireless.org/hearingaid/hac_video.cfm]
- [Wireless RERC Consumer Forum: My Wireless Review](http://www.mywirelessreview.com)
[http://www.mywirelessreview.com]

Helena Mitchell Speaks at FCC's Workshop on Broadband Access

October 20, 2009 - Helena Mitchell, Ph.D. was a speaker on the Policy Roundtable at the FCC's Staff Workshop on Broadband Access for People with Disabilities on October 20th. In addition, Mr. Ed Price of the Wireless Emergency Communications (WEC) project of the Wireless RERC demonstrated prototype technology for sending accessible alerts to mobile devices. Attendees were able to view, hear, and feel the mobile client software applications for presenting alert content with accommodations for blind/low vision and deaf/hard of hearing users. The prototypes included systems capable of receiving live alerts of weather emergencies from the NOAA National Weather Service, simulations of the FCC's forthcoming CMAS, and an experimental ASL video alert.

Additional Information

- [Helena Mitchell, Ph.D.: Recommendations to the FCC Regarding the National Broadband Plan and Accessibility](http://www.cacp.gatech.edu/docs/Recommendations%20to%20FCC%20relating%20to%20the%20National%20Broadband%20Plan%20and%20Accessibility.doc)
[http://www.cacp.gatech.edu/docs/Recommendations to FCC relating to the National Broadband Plan and Accessibility.doc]

Upcoming Events

CSUN Conference on Technology and Persons with Disabilities

March 22, 2010-March 27, 2010 - The 25th Annual International Technology and Persons with Disabilities Conference, hosted by California State University, Northridge, will be held at the **San Diego** Manchester Grand Hyatt Hotel, on **March 22-27, 2010**. For more information about the conference, please visit the CSUN Center on Disabilities website at

[<http://www.csunconference.org/index.cfm?EID=80000218>].

[Source: CSUN Center on Disabilities]

FCC Field Hearing on Broadband Access for People with Disabilities

November 06, 2009 – The FCC will hold a field hearing on broadband access for people with disabilities at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., on Friday, November 6, 2009, from 9:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. The hearing will take place in the Multipurpose Room of the Jordan Student Academic Center, located on 800 Florida Avenue, NE. The hearing will consist of two panels. The first will be entitled “Broadband Access for People with Disabilities: Experiences, Opportunities, and Barriers,” and the second will be “Broadband Access for People with Disabilities: Solutions and Recommendations.”

Reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities will be provided upon request; however, the FCC asks that individuals seeking accommodations inform them of their needs as soon as possible and provide as much detail as possible. Contact the FCC’s Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau at fcc504@fcc.gov, 202-418-0530 (voice), or 202-418-0432 (TTY). The conference will also be made available online at <http://www.fcc.gov/live>, and the public will have the opportunity to submit questions online. For more information about the hearing, please visit [http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-294267A1.pdf] (MS Word and PDF versions available).

[Source: FCC]

NCTI 2009 Technology Innovators Conference

November 16-17, 2009 – The National Center for Technology Innovation (NCTI) will be hosting its 2009 Technology Innovator’s Conference, to be held at the Madison Hotel in **Washington, D.C.**, on **November 16-17, 2009**. The theme of this year’s conference will be “Educational Futures—Powered by Technology,” with a focus on “how learning and assistive technologies can supercharge education for *all* students.” The conference will feature leaders from academia, corporations, government and the media who will examine methods to strengthen teaching and learning through the effective use of technology. Presentations will focus on best and emerging practices to ensure that all students, particularly struggling learners, fulfill their academic and social potential.

In addition, NCTI will host its 2009 Tech Expo at the conference. It will provide an opportunity to showcase innovative learning and assistive technology products and network with others from industry, academia, policy, and the media. For more information about the conference, how to submit a proposal for the expo, and submission guidelines, please visit the NCTI website at [<http://www.nationaltechcenter.org/index.php/2009/06/05/conf09-2009-technology-innovators-conference/>].

[Source: NCTI]

Technology and Disability Policy Highlights reports on national and local public policy events and recent wireless technological advances and political activities; and tracks emerging issues of interest to individuals with disabilities. *Technology and Disability Policy Highlights* is published monthly by the Wireless RERC. The Wireless RERC is a research center promotes universal access to wireless technologies and explores their innovative applications in addressing the needs of people with disabilities. For more information on the Wireless RERC, please visit our web site at [<http://www.wirelessrerc.org>].

For further information on items summarized in this report, or if you have items of interest that you would like included in future editions, please contact this edition's editor, Nathan W. Moon [nathan.moon@cacp.gatech.edu] or Paul M.A. Baker, Ph.D., AICP, CACP Director of Research [paul.baker@cacp.gatech.edu].

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