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HOUSE BILL NO. 2541

Offered January 13, 2025

Prefiled January 9, 2025

A BILL to amend and reenact §§ 2.2-3500 through 2.2-3504 of the Code of Virginia and to amend the Code of Virginia by adding in Chapter 35 of Title 2.2 a section numbered 2.2-3505, relating to Information Technology Access Act; digital accessibility.

Patrons—Tran, Bennett-Parker, Clark, Helmer, Hope, Krizek, LeVere Bolling, Lopez, Price and Shin; Senator: Perry

Referred to Committee on Communications, Technology and Innovation

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §§ 2.2-3500 through 2.2-3504 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted and that the Code of Virginia is amended by adding in Chapter 35 of Title 2.2 a section numbered 2.2-3505 as follows:

§ 2.2-3500. Findings; policy.

A. The General Assembly finds that (i) the advent of the information age throughout the United States and around the world has resulted in lasting changes in information and communications technology; (ii) use of interactive visual display terminals information and communications technology by state and state-assisted organizations is becoming has become a widespread means of access for employees and the public to obtain information available electronically, but nonvisual access, whether by speech, Braille, or other appropriate means for persons with disabilities has often been overlooked in when developing, designing, purchasing, and deploying the latest information and communications technology; (iii) presentation of electronic data solely in a visual format is a barrier to access by individuals who are blind or visually impaired, preventing when presentation of data through information and communications technology is not accessible by persons with disabilities, it prevents them from participating on equal terms in crucial areas of life, such as education and employment; (iv) alternatives, including both software and hardware adaptations, have been created so that interactive control of computers and use of the information presented is possible by both visual and nonvisual means accessible information and communications technology is often cheaper for the government in the long run because it does not require post-implementation adaptations and does not expose the government to liability under various state and federal laws that require access for persons with disabilities; and (v) the goals of the state in obtaining and deploying the most advanced forms of information and communications technology properly include universal access so that the segments of society with particular needs (including individuals unable to use visual displays) persons with disabilities will not continue to be left out of the information age the latest and future technological innovations.

B. It is the policy of the Commonwealth that all covered entities shall conduct themselves in accordance with the following principles: (i) individuals who are blind or visually impaired all persons with disabilities have the right to full participation in the life of the Commonwealth, including the use of advanced information and communications technology that is provided by such covered entities for use by employees, program participants, students, and members of the general public, and (ii) technology purchased in whole or in part with funds provided by the Commonwealth, acquired, or developed in-house by a covered entity to be used for the creation, storage, retrieval, display, or dissemination of information and intended for use by employees, program participants, students, and members of the general public shall be adaptable for access by individuals who are blind or visually impaired. The implementation of nonvisual access technology under this chapter shall be determined on a case-by-case basis as the need arises accessible by all persons with disabilities.

§ 2.2-3501. Definitions.

As used in this chapter, unless the context requires a different meaning:

"Access" means the ability to receive, use, and manipulate data and operate controls included in information and communications technology.

"Blind" or "visually impaired" individual means an individual who has: (i) a visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with correcting lenses or has a limited field of vision so that the widest diameter of the visual field subtends an angle no greater than 20 degrees; (ii) a medically indicated expectation of visual deterioration; or (iii) a medically diagnosed limitation in visual functioning that restricts the individual's ability to read and write standard print at levels expected of individuals of comparable ability.

"Accessibility" means alignment with federal Section 508 Standards and Section 255 Guidelines adopted pursuant to 29 U.S.C. § 794d and 47 U.S.C. § 255.

"Accessibility Conformance Report" means a completed Voluntary Product Accessibility Template

58 (VPAT) or other document indicating the conformance of a product to accessibility standards such as federal
59 Section 508 Standards and Section 255 Guidelines adopted pursuant to 29 U.S.C. § 794d and 47 U.S.C. §
60 255. The Accessibility Conformance Report shall be completed by a digital accessibility subject matter expert
61 with significant experience with product evaluation or by a qualified neutral third party.

62 "Acquired" means obtained from a third party without the need to engage in the procurement process.

63 "Covered entity" means all state agencies, public school divisions, public institutions of higher education,
64 and political subdivisions of the Commonwealth.

65 "Digital accessibility" means technology that is designed in a way that allows for access by all users
66 regardless of the platform, including desktops, laptops, mobile platforms, and handheld devices. "Digital
67 accessibility" (i) includes the design of electronic documents, websites, applications, hardware, software,
68 video, audio, kiosks, copiers and printers, and other digital tools and (ii) allows for the integration and use of
69 assistive technologies such as screen readers, refreshable Braille displays, alternative input devices, and
70 tools that allow for the customization of a digital asset to achieve necessary levels of access.

71 "Head of each covered entity" means the person responsible for making executive decisions on behalf of
72 the covered entity.

73 "Information and communications technology" or "ICT" means ~~all electronic~~ any website, application,
74 hardware, software, or other product or service primarily intended to fulfill or enable the function of
75 information processing ~~hardware and software~~ and communication by electronic means, including
76 ~~telecommunications~~ transmission and display via the Internet.

77 "Nonvisual" means synthesized speech, Braille, and other output methods not requiring sight.

78 "Public broadcasting services" means the acquisition, production, and distribution by public broadcasting
79 stations of noncommercial educational, instructional, informational, or cultural television and radio programs
80 and information that may be transmitted by means of electronic communications, and related materials and
81 services provided by such stations.

82 "Telecommunications" means the transmission of information, images, pictures, voice, or data by radio,
83 video, or other electronic or impulse means, but does not include public broadcasting.

84 "Person with a disability" means the same as that term is defined in § 51.5-40.1.

85 "Procured" means a product or service obtained through a covered entity's procurement process.

86 "Vendor Accessibility Roadmap" means a document prepared and provided by the vendor highlighting the
87 aspects and elements of the product that do not meet accessibility standards and includes the timelines for
88 these aspects and elements to meet such accessibility standards.

89 **§ 2.2-3502. Assurance of digital accessibility.**

90 In general, the head of each covered entity or his designee shall ensure that information technology
91 equipment and software the ICT used by blind or visually impaired employees, program participants,
92 students, or members of the general public who have a disability (i) ~~provide~~ provides access (including
93 interactive use of the equipment, digital tools, and services) that is equivalent to that provided to individuals
94 who ~~are not blind or visually impaired~~ do not have a disability; (ii) ~~are~~ is designed to present information
95 (including prompts used for interactive communications) in formats ~~accessible or~~ adaptable to both ~~visual~~
96 ~~and nonvisual~~ use persons with and without disabilities; and (iii) ~~have been purchased under a contract that~~
97 ~~includes the technology access clause required pursuant to § 2.2-3503~~ conforms with the accessibility
98 requirements as provided in 28 C.F.R. § 35.200 whether developed in-house by a covered entity or procured.

99 **§ 2.2-3503. Procurement requirements.**

100 A. ~~The~~ An information and communications technology access clause ~~specified in clause (iii) of §~~
101 ~~2.2-3502~~ shall be developed by the Secretary of Administration and shall require ~~compliance with the~~
102 ~~nonvisual access standards established in subsection B~~ a current vendor-paid and completed Accessibility
103 Conformance Report indicating the level of conformance with accessibility for the ICT being procured by the
104 covered entity. Any areas of nonconformance shall be documented with a vendor-paid and completed Vendor
105 Accessibility Roadmap highlighting areas requiring improved accessibility, including a timeline for each
106 nonconforming area's completion. The clause shall be included in all future contracts for the procurement of
107 information technology ICT by, or for the use of, entities covered by this chapter for which negotiation or
108 renegotiation is begun on or after the effective date of this chapter.

109 B. At a minimum, the nonvisual access standards shall include the following: (i) the effective, interactive
110 control and use of the technology (including the operating system); applications programs, and format of the
111 data presented, shall be readily achievable by nonvisual means; (ii) the technology equipped for nonvisual
112 access shall be compatible with information technology used by other individuals with whom the blind or
113 visually impaired individual interacts; (iii) nonvisual access technology shall be integrated into networks used
114 to share communications among employees, program participants, and the public; and (iv) the technology for
115 nonvisual access shall have the capability of providing equivalent access by nonvisual means to
116 telecommunications or other interconnected network services used by persons who are not blind or visually
117 impaired. A covered entity may stipulate additional specifications in any procurement.

118 Compliance with the nonvisual access standards shall not be required if the head of a covered entity

119 determines that (a) the information technology is not available with nonvisual access because the essential
 120 elements of the information technology are visual and (b) nonvisual equivalence is not available. Such
 121 procurement procedure adopted pursuant to this section shall not supersede or conflict with any vendor
 122 procedure or policy adopted by a public institution of higher education under the Restructured Higher
 123 Education Financial and Administrative Operations Act (§ 23.1-1000 et seq.).

124 **§ 2.2-3504. Exclusions to digital accessibility.**

125 A. The head of any covered entity may, with respect to nonvisual access software or peripheral devices,
 126 approve the exclusion of the technology access clause only to the extent that the cost of the software or
 127 devices for the covered entity would increase the total cost of the procurement by more than five percent. All
 128 exclusions of the technology access clause from any contract shall be reported annually to the Secretary of
 129 Administration or his designee shall report to the appropriate executive branch agency any non-accessible
 130 technology that is included in the exceptions found in 28 C.F.R. § 35.201. Each executive branch agency
 131 shall report annually to the General Assembly on such non-accessible technology and provide an estimate on
 132 the fiscal impact involved in bringing such technology into compliance with federal and state laws and
 133 regulations.

134 B. The acquisition and installation of hardware, software, or peripheral devices used for nonvisual access
 135 when the information technology is being used exclusively by individuals who are not blind or visually
 136 impaired shall not be required.

137 C. Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection B, the applications programs and underlying operating
 138 systems (including the format of the data) used for the manipulation and presentation of information shall
 139 permit the installation and effective use of nonvisual access software and peripheral devices.

140 **§ 2.2-3505. Designation of covered entity digital accessibility coordinator.**

141 A. The head of each covered entity or his designee may designate an employee to serve as such covered
 142 entity's digital accessibility coordinator. The digital accessibility coordinator shall be responsible for
 143 ensuring that the covered entity complies with state and federal laws, including the Virginians with
 144 Disabilities Act (§ 51.5-1 et seq.) and the Virginia Human Rights Act (§ 2.2-3900 et seq.), to ensure that the
 145 ICT and other products or services can be accessed by persons with disabilities. The covered entity's digital
 146 accessibility coordinator shall also be responsible for developing and implementing the covered entity's
 147 digital accessibility policy.

148 B. Each covered entity shall publish, in a conspicuous and easily accessible location on its website, the
 149 name, phone number, email address, and office address of the covered entity's digital accessibility
 150 coordinator or other person to whom reports of barriers to digital accessibility may be reported. The digital
 151 accessibility coordinator or other person designated by the covered entity shall develop procedures to review
 152 and respond to reports of barriers to digital accessibility.

153 **2. That the provisions of § 2.2-3503 of the Code of Virginia, as amended by this act, shall only apply to**
 154 **contracts entered into or renewed on or after the effective dates of this act in accordance with the third**
 155 **and fourth enactments.**

156 **3. That the provisions of this act shall apply to (i) a covered entity, as defined in § 2.2-3501 of the Code**
 157 **of Virginia, as amended by this act, with a population of 50,000 or more persons, (ii) institutions of**
 158 **higher education, and (iii) state public bodies beginning April 24, 2026.**

159 **4. That the provisions of this act shall apply to special district governments, as defined in 28 C.F.R. §**
 160 **35.104, and covered entities, as defined in § 2.2-3501 of the Code of Virginia, as amended by this act,**
 161 **with a population of less than 50,000 persons, beginning April 26, 2027.**

162 **5. That for the purposes of the third and fourth enactments of this act, the provisions of this act shall**
 163 **apply to local school districts as it applies to the locality within which the school district sits.**

164 **6. That executive branch agencies required to report to the General Assembly pursuant to the**
 165 **provisions of § 2.2-3504 of the Code of Virginia, as amended by this act, shall provide guidance to the**
 166 **General Assembly on how to prioritize systems and applications by December 1, 2025.**