

**Department of Legislative Services**  
Maryland General Assembly  
2014 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**  
**Revised**

Senate Bill 446

(Senator Conway, *et al.*)

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

Appropriations

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**Department of Disabilities - Study of Accessibility Concepts in Computer Science, Information Systems, and Information Technology Programs in Higher Education**

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This bill requires the Department of Disabilities (DOD), in cooperation with the National Federation of the Blind, to study accessibility concepts in computer science, information systems, and information technology programs in higher education. As part of the study, DOD must convene a workgroup that consists of specified members. A preliminary report with findings and recommendations is due by December 15, 2015, and a final report is due by June 30, 2017.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2014, and terminates June 30, 2017.

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** DOD can convene the required workgroup and produce the required reports using existing resources. Revenues are not affected.

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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**Analysis**

**Bill Summary:** For the purposes of the bill, “accessibility” means fully and equally accessible to and independently usable by individuals with disabilities so that the individuals are able to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as users without disabilities, with substantially equivalent ease of use.

DOD must compile existing information on and identify any gaps in the current course offerings for accessibility to information technologies at institutions of higher education in the State. If gaps in the course offerings for accessibility to information technologies are found, the department must determine what is needed to close the gaps and the State and local cost of each proposal to close the gaps. DOD must also make recommendations on (1) the appropriate number of course offerings for accessibility to information technologies, including proposals for additional course offerings, if necessary; (2) funding requirements and budgetary priorities to address the issues raised by the proposals considered by DOD; (3) legislation and policy initiatives to address the issues raised by the proposals considered by DOD; and (4) any other relevant issues considered by DOD.

**Current Law/Background:** As technology becomes more prevalent in everyday situations, issues regarding accessibility to information technology go beyond website accessibility; the accessibility of computer hardware, software, and the supporting infrastructure must be considered. For example, the accessibility of e-readers (portable devices used primarily for reading electronic books) and general purpose tables with book-reading applications, like the iPad has been debated in education circles. The requirements of Section 508 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 are raising awareness of website and information technology accessibility. In general, federal agencies must ensure that, when developing, procuring, maintaining, or using electronic and information technology, they take into account the needs of all end users – including people with disabilities.

Websites, especially as the material becomes more sophisticated, can end up presenting obstacles to some individuals with disabilities, especially the blind. For example, screen reader technology used by the blind does not work properly with websites with multiple frames. In addition, some websites have inconsistent navigation or use inaccessible documents. However, awareness of making online materials accessible has grown and more providers of online content are considering accessibility when developing their content.

DOD is the principal State agency responsible for developing, maintaining, revising, and enforcing statewide disability policies and standards throughout State government. DOD works to increase the capacity of Maryland communities to provide services in inclusive settings; create a citizen-centered delivery system in which consumers can exercise meaningful choice and maintain control of their lives; infuse the service delivery system with elevated expectations about the capacities of people with disabilities; incorporate accessible and universal design into Maryland's communities and technologies; and construct a seamless, responsive, and coordinated service delivery system. To that end, DOD directs the development and implementation of the Statewide Disability Plan

designed to improve, consolidate, coordinate, modify, and unify services for people with disabilities.

In addition, DOD provides information on programs and services available to Marylanders with disabilities; provides expertise regarding law and State compliance issues; and helps citizens with disabilities to access resources, information and technology. DOD also administers the Constituent Services Program, the Access Maryland Program, the Technology Assistance Program, and the Attendant Care Program.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** HB 396 (Delegate F. Turner, *et al.*) - Appropriations.

**Information Source(s):** Department of Information Technology, Maryland Higher Education Commission, Department of Disabilities, Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - January 31, 2014  
ncs/rhh Revised - Senate Third Reader - March 31, 2014  
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