



PUBLIC NOTICE

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

News Media Information 202 / 418-0500
Internet: <https://www.fcc.gov>
TTY: 1-888-835-5322

DA 16-745

Released: June 30, 2016

COMMISSION ANNOUNCES ENTITIES SELECTED FOR CERTIFICATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE NATIONAL DEAF-BLIND EQUIPMENT DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM FOR FLORIDA AND WASHINGTON

Washington, D.C. – The Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau (CGB or Bureau) of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC or Commission) has selected the Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults (HKNC) and the Perkins School for the Blind (Perkins) for certification to participate in the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program (NDBEDP) for the states of Florida and Washington, respectively, effective July 1, 2016.

The NDBEDP is a program mandated by Section 105 of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act (CVAA) that provides funding of up to \$10 million annually for the distribution of communications equipment to low-income individuals who are deaf-blind.¹ On April 4, 2011, the Commission adopted the *NDBEDP Pilot Program Order*, establishing the framework for a pilot program to fulfill this CVAA mandate.² In that *Order*, the Commission determined that it would certify one entity per state as eligible to receive support for the local distribution of equipment to low-income individuals who are deaf-blind.³ Each certified entity has primary oversight and responsibility for compliance with program requirements for its state, but certified entities may fulfill their responsibilities either directly or through collaboration, partnership, or contract with other individuals or entities in-state or out-of-state, including other NDBEDP certified programs.⁴ Participation in the NDBEDP also entails the provision of related services, including local outreach, individual assessments and training, as well as equipment installation and maintenance, that may be needed to effectively provide a person who is deaf-blind with the equipment that he or she needs to access the communications services covered by the CVAA.⁵

The Commission launched the NDBEDP on July 1, 2012.⁶ On July 2, 2012, the Commission announced that it had selected one entity for each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico,

¹ Pub. L. 111-260, 124 Stat. 2751 (2010); *see also* Pub. L. 111-265, 124 Stat. 2795 (2010) (making technical corrections to the CVAA). Section 105 of the CVAA adds Section 719 to the Communications Act of 1934, as amended, and is codified at 47 U.S.C. § 620. The CVAA authorizes the Commission to allocate these funds from the interstate telecommunications relay service fund (TRS Fund).

² *See Implementation of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010, Section 105, Relay Services for Deaf-Blind Individuals*, Report and Order, 26 FCC Rcd 5640 (2011) (*NDBEDP Pilot Program Order*).

³ *Id.*, 26 FCC Rcd at 5646, para. 12.

⁴ *Id.*, 26 FCC Rcd at 5647, para. 13.

⁵ *Id.*, 26 FCC Rcd at 5667-5676, paras. 63-79. The NDBEDP pilot program will cover the reasonable costs of such related services. *See* 47 CFR § 64.610(f)(2).

⁶ *Commission Announces Launch of the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program*, Public Notice, 27 FCC Rcd 7403 (CGB July 2, 2012).

and the Virgin Islands to participate in the NDBEDP.⁷ The Commission selected Florida Telecommunications Relay, Inc. (FTRI) as the certified program to participate in the NDBEDP for Florida, and the Department of Social and Health Services – Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DSHS-ODHH) as the certified program for the state of Washington.⁸

In May 2016, FTRI and DSHS-ODHH each notified the Commission that they would relinquish their respective certifications to participate in the NDBEDP effective June 30, 2016.⁹ On May 26, 2016, the Bureau invited applications for certification to participate in the NDBEDP for the states of Florida and Washington.¹⁰ In response, the Commission received one application for the state of Florida from HKNC and one application for the state of Washington from Perkins. In accordance with the *NDBEDP Pilot Program Order*, the Bureau reviewed the applications for HKNC's and Perkins's ability to meet the following qualifications, either directly or in coordination with other programs or entities:

- expertise in the field of deaf-blindness, including familiarity with the culture and etiquette of people who are deaf-blind, to ensure that equipment distribution and the provision of related services occurs in a manner that is relevant and useful to consumers who are deaf-blind;
- ability to communicate effectively with people who are deaf-blind (for training and other purposes), by among other things, using sign language, providing materials in Braille, ensuring that information made available online is accessible, and using other assistive technologies and methods to achieve effective communication;
- staffing and facilities sufficient to administer the program, including the ability to distribute equipment and provide related services to eligible individuals throughout the state, including those in remote areas;
- experience with the distribution of specialized customer premises equipment, especially to people who are deaf-blind;
- experience in training users on how to use the equipment and how to set up the equipment for its effective use; and
- familiarity with the telecommunications, Internet access, and advanced communications services that will be used with the distributed equipment.¹¹

The Bureau has determined that HKNC and Perkins meet the Commission's qualifications for certification to operate NDBEDP programs in Florida and Washington. HKNC has been operating the NDBEDP in New York since July 1, 2012,¹² and has since become the certified entity to operate the

⁷ *Commission Announces Entities Certified to Participate in the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program*, Public Notice, 27 FCC Rcd 7397 (CGB July 2, 2012).

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Letter from James Forstall, Executive Director, Florida Telecommunications Relay, Inc., to Jackie Ellington, NDBEDP Administrator, Disability Rights Office, CGB (May 5, 2016); Letter from Diane Cinney, Program Manager, Deaf-Blind Services, Department of Social and Health Services – Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, to Jackie Ellington, FCC (May 6, 2016).

¹⁰ *FCC Invites Applications for Certification to Participate in the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program in the States of Indiana and Minnesota*, Public Notice, DA 16-591 (rel. May 26, 2016).

¹¹ See 47 CFR § 64.610(b)(3).

¹² *Commission Announces Entities Certified to Participate in the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program*, Public Notice, 27 FCC Rcd 7397 (CGB 2012).

program in two additional states.¹³ Perkins has been operating the NDBEDP program in Massachusetts and 11 other states since July 1, 2012,¹⁴ and has since become the certified entity to operate the program in seven additional states.¹⁵ Through this and other aspects of their respective enterprises (that are independent of the pilot NDBEDP), HKNC and Perkins have each demonstrated extensive experience in providing accessible services in a manner that shows cultural awareness of the deaf-blind community and considerable expertise in communications technology used by individuals who are deaf-blind. As the NDBEDP certified programs for Florida and Washington, HKNC and Perkins, respectively, will work in partnership with local agencies to meet the needs of the deaf-blind populations throughout Florida¹⁶ and Washington.¹⁷

Accordingly, the Bureau grants certification to the Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults to participate in the NDBEDP for the state of Florida and to the Perkins School for the Blind for the state of Washington. HKNC and Perkins will retain certification for these states for the duration of the NDBEDP pilot program,¹⁸ subject to their compliance with the Commission's program requirements.¹⁹

ACCESSIBLE FORMATS: To request materials in accessible formats for people with disabilities (Braille, large print, electronic files, audio format), send an e-mail to fcc504@fcc.gov or call the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau at 202-418-0530 (voice), 202-418-0432 (TTY).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jackie Ellington, Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, 202-418-1153, e-mail Jackie.Ellington@fcc.gov; or Rosaline Crawford, Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, 202-418-2075, e-mail Rosaline.Crawford@fcc.gov.

-FCC-

¹³ HKNC is also the certified entity to operate the NDBEDP in Iowa and Hawaii.

¹⁴ Perkins is the original certified entity to participate in the NDBEDP in the states of: Arizona, Arkansas, Maryland, Montana, New Mexico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Texas, West Virginia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands.

¹⁵ Perkins is also the NDBEDP certified entity to operate the NDBEDP in Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nevada, Utah, and Vermont.

¹⁶ The HKNC application also included letters from organizations in Florida that support its certification and will work collaboratively with HKNC to fulfill NDBEDP requirements. *See, e.g.* Letter from Robert Kelley, Executive Director, Conklin Center for the Blind, to NDBEDP Administrator, Disability Rights Office, CGB (June 2, 2016); Letter from Kathryn Zarate, Vice President, Florida Deaf-Blind Association, Inc., to the FCC (June 5, 2016); Letter from Emily Taylor-Snell, M.Ed., FAVI-DBC Project Coordinator, University of Florida, to NDBEDP Administrator, Disability Rights Office, CGB (June 7, 2016).

¹⁷ The Perkins application also included letters from organizations in Washington that support its certification and will work collaboratively with Perkins to fulfill NDBEDP requirements. *See, e.g.,* Letter from Alan J. Knue, State Project Director, Washington Assistive Technology Act Program, University of Washington Center for Technology, to NDBEDP Administrator, Disability Rights Office, CGB (June 1, 2016); Letter from Scott McCallum, Superintendent, Washington State School for the Blind, to Perkins School for the Blind (June 7, 2016); Letter from Lou Oma Durand, Executive Director, Department of Services for the Blind, to Jackie Ellington, FCC (June 8, 2016); Letter from Steve Fiksdal, President, Washington Council of the Blind, to Jackie Ellington, FCC (June 9, 2016).

¹⁸ The termination date for the NDBEDP pilot program is June 30, 2017. *Implementation of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010, Section 105, Relay Services for Deaf-Blind Individuals*, Order, FCC 16-69 (May 27, 2016).

¹⁹ *See NDBEDP Pilot Program Order*, 26 FCC Rcd at 5647, para. 14; *see generally*, 47 CFR §§ 64.610(a)-(k).