Analysis of ICT Accessibility Policy in Kentucky

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Access to information and communication technologies has become imperative to everyday life for the people who reside in Kentucky. These technologies have been implemented across many different aspects of life including communication, business, education, finance, healthcare, and security (AEO Logic, 2022). However, not everyone has the same access to these technologies due to disabilities. This can make their lives difficult as the reliance on information and communication technology continues to rise. That's why the state and federal government have implemented accessibility policies and laws to help mitigate the effect disabilities have on the ability to interact with these technologies. During this paper I will be analyzing Kentucky's accessibility policy and discussing how it has helped disabled Kentuckians have better access to information and communication technologies.

Current Policy

Kentucky's current accessibility policy pulls from both federal and state legislation as well as third-party guidelines to help provide users with disabilities full access to information and communication technologies. Kentucky's current foundation for accessibility policy comes from the revisions of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act and Section 255 of the Telecommunications Act. The revision of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act ensures that users with disabilities have equal access to information and communication technologies that are used by or procured by the government (U.S. Access Board, n.d.). This includes but is not limited to government and government affiliated websites, software and hardware, government multimedia, and phone systems (*Information and Communication Technology*, n.d.) The revision of Section 255 of the Telecommunications Act aims to ensure that users with disabilities have equal access to the use of telecommunications equipment such as smartphones, television

services, and the hardware used to interact with both. (U.S. Access Board (2), n.d.). With the

foundation from the federal government set, Kentucky enacted the Kentucky Accessible

Information Technology Law. This further expands on the two previously mentioned acts by

ensuring that any Kentucky state institution, or any institution affiliated with Kentucky's state

government, provides adequate services and accommodations for people with disabilities. The

Kentucky AIT also provides information on when and how to address areas that lack

accessibility that were present before the AIT when enacted (KATS Network, n.d.). Along with

the Kentucky Accessible Information Technology Law, Kentucky has adopted the World Wide

Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibiliity Guidelines 1.0 Conformance Level "Double-A"

and applied it to their state and affiliated websites to ensure that their websites and functions are

accessible (Kentucky General Assembly, n.d.). To ensure that all criteria previously laid out are

followed, Kentucky provides a system in which a user can report an accessibility issue. The

offending party is then given a specific amount of time, depending on the issue, to resolve the

accessibility concern. Overall, all these moving parts come together to make up Kentucky's

information and communication technology accessibility policy.

Who is Affected and Scope of the Issue

As of 2023, approximately 27%, or one out of every four people, currently have a

recorded disability in the United Staes (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023).

When looking at Kentucky specifically, that number drastically increases to 37%, or one out of

every three people, who have a recorded disability. This means that there are over 1.3 million

people in the state of Kentucky that may not be able to interact with information and

communication technology without assistance (CDC National Center on Birth Defects and

Developmental Disabilities, 2023). This poses a major challenge to those people due to the

integration of information and communication technologies into multiple aspects of everyday life. Things like finding a job and working, finding and engaging with healthcare, managing finances, receiving an education, and most importantly, communication, all rely on information and communication technologies (AEO Logic, 2022). This problem may also affect people who do not have a disability as well. Without accessible communication, communication with loved ones who are disabled can be difficult or impossible over a long distance. Businesses who have inaccessible websites and engagement tools can exclude a large portion of potential customers who may be interested in or need a product (WebAIM, 2020). Having information and communication technologies that are accessible benefits everyone and allows for a much more inclusionary world.

Effect of the Policy on the Issue

Kentucky's accessible information and communication technology policy has given many disabled citizens of Kentucky the ability to engage with technology effectively and efficiently. Because of this policy, government and affiliated websites have started using the World Wide Web Consortiums guidelines on accessible websites. This allows disabled users full access to government content and functions that may be important to their lives. This policy also ensures that disabled citizens of Kentucky have equal opportunity to use and access important communication devices such as smartphones and televisions. Kentucky's accessibility policy has led to an overall improvement of the lives of many disabled people in Kentucky.

Policy Alternative

I personally do not think there is any alternative to Kentucky's accessibility policy. Even though this policy has already drastically improved quality of life for disabled people, I still do think that it can be improved. So, instead of an entirely alternative policy, I will be discussing an

improvement that would increase its effectiveness. One major problem that this policy does not address is the high cost of the technologies needed to help disabled users engage with information and communication technology. Kentucky currently sits at 48th in per captita personal income within the United States (U.S. Economic Development Administration, 2023). This overall low income already gives the people of Kentucky a disadvantage when needing to make expensive purchases. However, after factoring in the low income or lack of ability to work for most people who have a disability, making a large purchase can seem like an impossible task. This is where the problem becomes apparent. The policy ensures that information and communication technology is accessible, however, it does not provide any help with getting some of the tools needed to reach the starting point. Assistive technologies such as braille keyboards and displays or sip and puff switches can cost tremendous amounts and the full cost primarily falls on the user (Radu, 2017). This is why I think it is imperative that Kentucky's accessibility policy includes financial help for assistive technologies through grants or some other program. This would give disabled people in Kentucky even better access to information and communication technologies.

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