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Testimony:

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Military Service:

Regular Army 1970 -1973, Vietnam Veteran 1971-72, Rank E5, MOS, Aircraft Instrument Repair 68F30, Honorable Discharge

Work Experience:

Journeyman Power Lineman, Field Service Engineer, Automation Sales Manager

Current:

In 2002, I was medically retired due to total blindness, no light perception. Since that time I have served in voluntary capacities with the Cleveland Sight Center, Blinded Veterans Association, Hines Blinded Veterans Association, Las Cruces ADA Advisory Committee and Mayor's Veterans Advisory Committee. In addition, I am a facilitator for local blind and vision impaired support groups.

Advocacy:

I have a passionate interest in technology, and I am self-taught in the use of access technology. While serving on the Las Cruces ADA Advisory Board, I advised the city Information Technology ( IT) department during their website redesign process regarding 508 compliance and provided training to city employees on how to create accessible information for webpages. I currently provide virtual training to other blinded veterans on how to effectively read a webpage.

Purpose:

To address problems that have allowed VA systems to continue to operate in noncompliance with Section 508 of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Summary of Section 508 from [www.ada.gov/508](http://www.ada.gov/508) :

"In 1998, Congress amended the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to require Federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology (EIT) accessible to people with disabilities. Inaccessible technology interferes with an ability to obtain and use information quickly and easily. Federal agencies must give disabled employees and members of the public access to information that is comparable to access available to others."

### What 508 Compliance Means to Me:

When I read a 508 compliant webpage using a screen reader, I expect to be able to read the page with the same level of ease and understanding as a sighted person.

### Background:

#### Using a Computer:

How do I use a computer? Let me show you. Visualize that you are sitting at your desk looking at your computer monitor. Now, close your eyes. With your eyes closed, imagine reaching for your mouse and clicking on a link. Now open your eyes. This exercise demonstrates the same difficulty I face. Because I am a blind computer user, I can't use a mouse or see the monitor so I use a screen reader which enables me to access information when using the computer.

#### Screen Reader:

A screen reader is an application that allows me to read the information displayed on the monitor. In order to read the information in the same way as a sighted person, the webpage needs to have consistent, accurate, and appropriately labeled elements.

#### VA Webpage Evaluation:

A team of several blinded veterans was asked to evaluate ten different webpages. We have developed an evaluation tool and used it to find how useable each page is for blind users.

### My findings:

While there are many types of elements that can be found on a webpage, here are three non-compliance elements I examined in my webpage evaluation.

#### Example 1, Headings Element:

The heading element provides structure for the webpage. Using a screen reader, I have the ability to navigate web pages through a heading structure. This means that I can view a list of all of the headings on the page and navigate directly to a heading level.

#### Heading Evaluation 1, Webpage Title: VA Jobs Home ([www.va.gov/jobs](http://www.va.gov/jobs)).

This example illustrates improper heading structure. There is no heading 1 on this page. A sighted person can scan the content of the page to find the purpose. I had to read through the entire web page in order to identify its purpose which finally states, "The Department of Veterans Affairs is committed to adding and retaining Veterans to our workforce...."

#### Example 2, Link Element:

The link element provides a method to move to another location on the same page, or to another location on the same site, or to a different site. The link should be consistently labeled in order to identify exact location.

#### Link Evaluation 2, Webpage Title: Search VA Forms, ([www.va.gov/forms](http://www.va.gov/forms))

This example exhibits enumerated links with no useful description. In order to locate a desired form, each link must be opened in order to identify which specific form you have located. There are 217 links to forms! That is a lot of forms to go through, even for a sighted person!

#### Example 3, Form Field Element:

The form field element provides the opportunity to enter data. In order to enter the correct data, there must be an accurate text label.

#### Form Field Evaluation 3, Webpage Title: OPA, The Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs, ([www.va.gov/opa](http://www.va.gov/opa))

This example exhibits inaccurate text labels. There are at least two failures on this page. First, the “Direct Deposit Sign-Up Form SF 1199A” is a scanned image. The screen reader can read Optical Character Recognition (OCR) files but not scanned image files. The second part of the failure is that because the form is an image, information cannot be inserted in an edit box.

#### Summary:

While I examined the ten VA webpages, I found that they do not provide me the same opportunity to access information as a sighted person. Each of the ten sample webpages that I was asked to examine exhibits 508 compliance failures. Some of these failures are more critical than others.

#### Final Thought:

Section 508 was enacted in the 20th century to ensure that all people with disabilities can access electronic and information technology. We have now completed 13 percent of the 21st century. The technology is available to solve these 508 compliance failures. There are many good examples of 508 compliant webpages. How much longer do we have to wait?