

**ANGUS DRIGO**  
**SENATE TESTIMONY**  
**COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS,**  
**VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND CONSUMER PROTECTION**

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Good morning Honorable Senator Carla Joseph, chair of the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection; members of the committee; other senators present and members of the public. I am Angus Drigo, Executive Director of The Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands (DRCVI).

Thank you for inviting me to testify on Bill No. 35-0236 – the “21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act (IDEA).” I am pleased to provide testimony on this bill sponsored by you and Sen. Samuel Carrion, as it’s paramount to the people DRCVI represents.

DRCVI was established in 1978 via an Act of Congress. It similarly saw the creation of 57 protection and advocacy organizations/agencies throughout the United States and its territories. We also are affiliated with the Northeast ADA Center, which provides information and assistance on all matters related to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Territorywide, there are still gaps in ADA compliance. I commend you, and co-sponsor Carrion, for taking prompt action regarding this legislation.

Today, I want to share a bit about digital accessibility, and the lack thereof, on behalf of those we advocate for. While the USVI does not yet have an app for all agencies offering services to the public, we live in a global world of constantly evolving technology. It has been nearly 17 years since the iPhone was first released. Some younger people may not even remember

when they lived without a tiny computer in their pocket connecting them to the rest of the world.

The Americans with Disabilities Act is now 34 years old, and in April the Attorney General of the United States issued a ruling to ensure that people with disabilities are not left behind as technology advances.

On April 8, 2024, the U.S. Department of Justice issued this ruling under Title II of the ADA Act that establishes specific requirements for making websites and mobile apps offered by state and local governments accessible to people with disabilities. The DOJ's ruling stipulates that web and mobile apps should follow a standard known as Web Content Accessibility Guidelines or WCAG, (Version 2.1, Level A.A) to address accessibility for those relying on screen readers, speech recognition software, captioning for videos, visual

contrast for those who have low vision or colorblindness and more accessible technology features.

This new rule addresses barriers that can arise when websites and apps are not designed with accessibility in mind. It gives governments with a population of more than 50,000 residents two years to make their websites and apps -- accessible to everyone, regardless of disability -- regardless of who created them.

Just as a circle with a person in a wheelchair indicates a parking spot, the most common Accessible Website symbol is a stick figure. The next time you see one, click on it to see what accessibility options that site has, and you can read that site's accessibility statement. You can also check if the site is accessible by repeatedly pressing the "Tab" key, you should see each page and drop-down list in turn. If an individual can navigate through the pages with just this button and without

using the mouse, a screen reader will be able to tell a person with a visual impairment or blindness what is on the page. A screen reader also uses text to speech technology or TTS just like the voice you hear now.

On our website, [drcvi.org](http://drcvi.org), accessibility adjustments are on the left of the page. On the left of the screen, click on the orange square with a white stick figure in the center. This will automatically take you to the “Accessibility Adjustments” page. Below the heading, you will see a button for our “Accessibility Statement”, which will guide you on which accessibility features our site has. Scroll past that to choose the specific “Content Adjustments” that can be turned on or off to tailor the page to individual needs.

## **Why is it important that a website is accessible?**

Accessibility means equal access to information and services, which is crucial for effective communication. In 2024, the web is essential for everyone, including individuals with disabilities. It serves as a gateway to education, employment, healthcare, government services, and social interactions.

Inaccessible websites and apps create a barrier and inequality for people with disabilities, and can stop them from accessing government services, participating in civic events, or engaging with community programs.

When websites and mobile apps are accessible, people with disabilities can participate fully in society, access resources, and exercise their rights.

Inaccessible websites create barriers for people with visual impairments, hearing loss, motor disabilities, cognitive challenges, and other disabilities. For example:

- A blind person relies on screen readers to navigate websites. If a site lacks proper headings, alt text for images, or keyboard navigation, they cannot access its content effectively.
- Individuals with motor disabilities may struggle with small buttons or complex navigation structures.
- Deaf users need captions or transcripts for multimedia content.

## **Legal and ethical obligations**

Laws and regulations, such as the ADA, mandate accessibility.

The U.S. Virgin Islands has a duty to ensure equal access to their digital services.

In summary, web accessibility is not just a legal requirement, it is a fundamental right that ensures equal participation and empowers people with disabilities to thrive in the digital age.

I am available to answer any questions that you may have.