Justice Department Announces Settlement with University of Chicago to Increase Access to People with Disabilities

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department today announced a settlement agreement under Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) with the University of Chicago under which the University will make its campus and services more accessible to individuals with disabilities.

Today’s out-of-court settlement resolves a compliance review during which the Department found violations of the ADA Standards for Accessible Design in newly constructed buildings, as well as barriers to existing facilities and elements such as doors, restrooms, signage, entrances, seating and assistive listening devices in assembly spaces, and exterior circulation routes. The University, located in Chicago, Ill., has agreed to involve the university community in preparing a plan under which it will make alterations to its facilities within four years and relocate certain types of services and programs to accessible facilities with prior notice. The agreement addresses a wide variety of services and facilities, including classroom and administrative buildings, housing, museums and libraries, access between facilities, athletic and performance areas, directional signage, transportation, and emergency preparedness.

“We applaud the University of Chicago for its extensive effort to improve campus access greatly for all students and visitors,” said Wan J. Kim, Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights. “We hope that other colleges and universities will follow this example and make the entire college experience accessible to their students with disabilities and others who visit their campuses.”

Under the agreement the University will:

- Ensure that all buildings and facilities in which programs, services, and amenities are offered to the public and the University community meet the accessibility criteria in the agreement, unless participation requires advance notice or registration;

- Ensure that those services and programs that do require advanced notice or registration (such as classes and receptions) are located in (or relocated to) an accessible location in the event that a person with a disability registers;

- Submit an accessibility plan for review to the Department by November 1, 2007, outlining how the University will comply with the agreement, after conducting architectural surveys and seeking public comment;

- Implement campus-wide emergency evacuation, sheltering, and shelter-in-place plans for individuals with disabilities; after public comment and Department review;

- Ensure that its transportation services, including its fixed-route campus-wide bus system and its Late Night Van service, meet the requirements of the ADA by October 1, 2006;

- Ensure that three percent of the units (and adjacent toilet rooms) in its student living facilities are accessible and dispersed among the facilities; and that, in addition, a reasonable number of housing facilities has an accessible entrance, first floor common area, and toilet room that is usable by a visitor with a disability;

- Display information on its website, by March 1, 2007, identifying accessible routes through the campus, accessible parking areas, accessible entrances to buildings, and accessible spaces within buildings;

- Post signs at facility entrances and toilet rooms identifying those that are accessible and, at inaccessible entrances and toilet rooms, directing individuals to the nearest accessible entrance or toilet room;

- Provide assistive listening systems and devices for people with hearing impairments in lecture halls, meeting rooms,
auditoria, and other assembly areas; and
- Correct violations of the new construction standards for accessibility by February 1, 2010.

Title III of the ADA requires that privately owned places of public accommodation, including colleges and universities, remove physical barriers to access existing facilities where it is readily achievable to do so, comply with accessibility standards for new construction and alterations, ensure that transportation services are accessible, and modify policies and practices where necessary to ensure full and equal enjoyment of services and facilities.

Anyone interested in finding out more about the ADA or the agreement can call the Justice Department’s toll-free ADA Information Line at 800-514-0301 or 800-514-0383 (TTY), or access its ADA web site at http://www.ada.gov.

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