



For Immediate Release

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Equal Rights Center Investigation Uncovers Widespread Accessibility Violations by Medical Care Providers

WASHINGTON, D.C., November 2, 2011—Tomorrow, the Equal Rights Center (ERC) will release a report documenting staggering levels of violations of federal accessibility requirements at hospitals, doctor’s offices, and pharmacies across the nation. The report, “Ill-Prepared: Health Care’s Barriers for People with Disabilities,” reveals that less than 25 percent of medical service providers were compliant with accessibility standards required under federal law.

“The denial of accessible health care compromises medical treatment and puts both health and lives at risk,” said Donald Kahl, ERC Executive Director. “We hope that, after reading this report, health care service providers will take the steps needed to comply with the law and effectively treat all patients, including people with disabilities.”

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibit both private and publically funded health care providers from discriminating against people with disabilities, and establish national standards to ensure that the health care facilities and services are accessible.

Each year, the ERC receives numerous complaints from individuals with disabilities across the nation who experience substantial health care disparities and lack of access to appropriate care. To further investigate these claims, the ERC initiated a three-pronged series of investigations focused on structural barriers in health care facilities, inaccessible medical equipment, and policies and procedures that create access barriers for patients with disabilities, such as inaccessible forms of communication.

The ERC’s investigation revealed significant barriers in the structural accessibility of doctors’ offices and equipment, and in effective communication for individuals who are blind or have low vision. As detailed in today’s report, of the hundreds of tested facilities:

- **Only 20 percent of optometrists’ offices** were able to perform a complete eye exam on someone who uses a wheelchair;
- **Only 23 percent of doctors’ offices and hospitals** offered patient information in large print, and **only 24 percent** offered patient information in an accessible format; and
- **Only 1 percent of pharmacies** offered any information in Braille and **only 1 percent** offered audible prescription bottles. In fact, **86 percent of tested pharmacies** would not accommodate the use of an audible prescription bottle even if provided by the customer.

“Despite legal accessibility requirements, significant impediments to service remain for the more than 54 million Americans living with a disability. These problems will only become more devastating as baby boomers age and the number of people with disabilities continues to grow,” said Kat Taylor, ERC Disability Rights Manager. “Access not only benefits individuals, but also society at large by creating a larger pool of healthy, productive, working citizens. The ERC is committed to ensuring equal access for all, and we hope that the findings in this report will lead service providers to join in this effort.”

To read the full report, go to: www.equalrightscenter.org/illprepared

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About the Equal Rights Center (www.equalrightscenter.org)

Originally formed in 1983, the Equal Rights Center (ERC) is a national non-profit civil rights organization based in Washington, D.C. With members located in every state, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, the ERC works nationally to promote equal opportunity in housing, employment, and access to public accommodations and government services for all protected classes under federal, state, and local laws.