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USVI Will Miss April 26 Federal Website Accessibility Deadline, BIT Warns of Legal Risks

BIT told lawmakers the Virgin Islands will miss the April 26 website accessibility deadline, but said high-risk systems are being prioritized as officials warn noncompliant public sites could expose agencies to ADA complaints and legal challenges.

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With less than 20 days remaining before a federal accessibility deadline, the V.I. Bureau of Information Technology told lawmakers Wednesday that it is making steady progress toward bringing government websites into compliance with disability-access standards, even as officials acknowledge the territory will not meet the April 26 target and could still face legal exposure if public-facing systems remain out of compliance.

BIT Director Rupert Ross updated the Senate Committee on Housing, Transportation and Telecommunications on the government's efforts to comply with a U.S. Department of Justice mandate requiring more accessible websites. He explained that the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, or WCAG, are a "set of simple rules to make websites easier for everyone to use, including people with disabilities."

Ross said there are different levels of accessibility within the WCAG framework, and that BIT is working toward Version 2.1 Level AA. He said the effort is focused on "ensuring equal access to online services for residents with disabilities, while also reducing legal, operational and reputational risk to the government of the Virgin Islands."

He acknowledged that BIT will not meet the April 26 federal deadline. However, Ross said, "this does not reflect inaction or disregard for federal obligations." Instead, he said remediation efforts have been underway, with "high impact and high risk systems" receiving priority and accessibility work now being incorporated into normal operations.

Even so, Ross warned that missing the deadline may create liability concerns. "Public facing systems that remain non compliant may expose the government to ADA-related complaints or legal challenges," he said.

Committee chair Senator Marvin Blyden reminded him that "private individuals can also sue your agencies if it is not in compliance with this mandate by this month."

Still, Ross said he took some comfort in the understanding that courts will "evaluate good faith progress, prioritization and governance." He maintained that the territory's work so far reflects real progress and argued that "there are also operational risks in rushing accessibility work solely to meet a date."

"The highest risk is not missing a date. The highest risk is implementing accessibility incorrectly and unsustainably," Ross said.

He also said the accessibility work is being carried out in close collaboration with the ADA director, "ensuring that technical WCAG requirements are aligned with civil rights obligations and reasonable accommodation considerations."

According to Ross, accessibility checks are also being "embedded into development practices, content updates and procurement processes to prevent future compliance gaps."

Ross said BIT has been working on compliance since becoming aware of the U.S. D.O.J. ruling in 2024. The bureau is managing an inventory of 80 public-facing executive branch websites, and he said the project's scope has since been expanded to "reflect government's real public-facing footprint, including semi-autonomous and externally managed platforms."

He told Senator Blyden that a sample of websites had already been assessed and that "between 71% and 90% of them are compliant." He did not provide the sample size.

Blyden recommended that BIT "send out [something] to all of the different agencies. Let them know the importance of this."

The U.S. Department of Justice's website, Ross noted, includes a process for filing complaints alleging violations of the mandated guidelines. Such complaints must be submitted within 180 days of the access issue.

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