

Response to Research and Development Component to the NDBEDP

CG Docket No. 10-210

November 16, 2010

The area of Assistive Technology for the Deaf-Blind is in great need of research and development as will become evident in the body of this statement. I am a specialist who has spent the last 16 years working closely and socializing with individuals who are deaf-blind. These individuals fall within a diverse spectrum in terms of their deaf-blindness and combined vision and hearing losses as well as their specific needs for specialized technology. In that time, I have provided services in the areas of independent living and specialized community supports to include orientation & mobility instruction, communication assistance, Assistive Technology (AT) consultations and adaptive daily living skills education to both children and adults, locally and nationally. As a result, I feel very qualified to comment on the great need for research and development in the area of specialized equipment for the deaf-blind with regard to funds allocated from the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010.

To begin with, there is a fundamental understanding that must be acknowledged and embraced by anyone attempting to appropriately serve the group of individuals who are deaf-blind or have combined vision and hearing losses. It must be recognized that these individuals consistently face 3 major challenges in their ability to:

- 1) adequately gain access to communication exchanges (This becomes more complicated when a person goes from having one communication partner to several and/or as the environment changes from quiet to noisy)
- 2) access visual and auditory information which is readily available to typically hearing and sighted individuals (adjustments may be gaining the ability to see text in highly-contrasted, large-print as well as simultaneously hearing the text generated directly to the ear/s through speech output systems)
- 3) safely and freely move through various community environments. (knowing where one specifically is in a given space, what their spatial relationships are to other things in that space, and being able to move directly between places of choice)

Deaf-Blind individuals must continually try to overcome these challenges on a regular basis. Currently, general technology and Assistive Technologies (AT) have only opened some doors for people who are deaf-blind and in most cases - only in fragments. Current technologies are by no means sophisticated enough in both hardware and systems design to make it easy or efficient for deaf-blind people to get complete access to most communication situations and available auditory and visual information present in most given environments. More often than not, deaf-blind individuals are forced to manage situations while receiving limited amounts of information (some of it distorted and inaccurate) and having only basic

communication exchanges while trying to accomplish the tasks of daily living activities or while attempting to participate in community activities.

For many individuals in this population, the complexity of a given situation will often determine the odds of one's success. The simpler the variables of the task that one has to simultaneously manage, the easier it is! Currently, a deaf-blind person without the assistance of trained support providers can't access most complex environments- period! Human service provision is currently the only methods available for people who are deaf-blind to gain access in community environments,. This is a factor that we hope the 21st Century Communication and Accessibility Act of 2010 will eventually help to resolve.

It is important to note that deaf-blind people need a device designed specifically for them, which has a single processing unit that can be easily controlled by one-hand and has the ability to magnify visual information (both near & far), enhance and discriminate various types of auditory information (communication exchanges & auditory alerts, location of sound sources, etc), and provide Braille & tactile graphic information & images (maps, incoming text, menus for incoming multiple-information sources). For many, this information needs to be presented in all three modes simultaneously through one single processing unit. This is the only way it can be truly effective and allow for the greatest amount of efficiency.

For these reasons it is critically important that resources be allocated toward research & development for specialized equipment that will uniformly and adequately provide access to the diverse spectrum of people who are deaf-blind. It is critical that a variety of members from the deaf-blind community who represent the diverse spectrum of deaf-blindness be involved in all stages of the R & D process.

Respectfully submitted by

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ed Gervasoni". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.

Ed Gervasoni, Ed.S.; Independent Living Specialist for the Deaf-Blind and
Current President of the Arizona Association of the Deaf-Blind
Tucson, Arizona
(520) 603-9016
Gerv57@aol.com