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ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

ROBERT H. SAMSON
Chief Information Officer

September 4, 2018

Commissioner RoAnn Destito
Office of General Services (OGS)
Corning Tower, 41st floor
Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY 12242

Re: NYSPSP's Digital Accessibility and Usability Testing Services Preferred Source Application

Dear Commissioner Destito,

As the Chief Information Officer ("CIO") of the New York State Office of Information Technology Services ("ITS"), I offer this letter of support on behalf of the application from the New York State Preferred Source Program for People Who Are Blind ("NYSPSP") for *Digital Accessibility and Usability Testing Services.*

As you know, the State must comply with a myriad of laws, rules and regulations ensuring accessibility to those citizens with visual impairment, including Titles II and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act ("ADA") and Sections 508, 504, and 503 of the Rehabilitation Act, and further supported under Governor Andrew M. Cuomo's Employment First Initiative, created through Executive Order 136. ITS, on behalf of client agencies it serves, takes this responsibility very seriously.

Inadequate Tools and Services Currently Available
As a practical matter, the unprecedented rise and dependency on digitized information and communications has resulted in numerous beneficial changes at work, school, and in life. Yet for millions of New Yorkers, these digital changes have created barriers to the ability of visually impaired individuals to interacting with the State – a reality which ITS finds unacceptable. To ensure that the State maximizes the accessibility and usability of digital information and communication for all citizens, ITS must be provided with the necessary services to accomplish this goal.

Many software tools currently available are generally structured to provide the user with basic understanding of accessibility. These tools produce basic reports outlining areas for improving accessibility, but provide few details and no guidance to implement any true form of usability

for visually impaired New Yorkers. While in use by many commercial providers, these tools have been found to be inadequate to meet the needs of ITS.

To compensate for this lack of automated usability testing, ITS may seek services to provide for in-person accessibility testing and guidance. These services are currently available from commercial providers, and are often procured on a discretionary basis or integrated into larger procurements as part of application accessibility testing and delivery. While ITS does not fault traditional commercial providers for their attempts to provide meaningful services in area, these services have not proven to be effective in providing adequate accessibility, as many of these service providers lack the real world experience of having been denied a true usable experience.

Long-Term Cost Savings

Application and website development is a time-consuming manual process, which requires a high level of expertise and technical knowledge. Like any complicated device, either digital or mechanical, applications are built to perform a series of self-contained tasks, and to interface with other applications in achieving their goal of providing efficient processing for the end-user. Because of this complexity, having usability functionality built into applications at the time of development is not only the right thing to do for visually impaired New Yorkers, but the most cost effective way to ensure application usability.

Once an application has been developed, the onboarding of expertise or re-engagement of vendors to deconstruct, build-upon, or patch together usability solutions compromises application efficiency, effectiveness, and consumes vastly more resources than had those features been integrated at the time of initial application development. Meanwhile, those New Yorkers who depend on these systems to deliver critical government services are waiting for these solutions to be implemented.

In addition to assistance provided during the development and testing period, the project based knowledge transfer services provided for in this application are vital to ensure long-term success of accessibility projects, while at the same time allowing for future cost savings by providing the state workforce with the knowledge and skills to understand many of the accessibility requirements in-house.

ITS Recommendation

The NYSPSP is submitting a Preferred Source application for the addition of their suite of digital accessibility governance services to build and strengthen New York State's digital infrastructure. For the reasons articulated above, ITS strongly supports this application and asks that OGS and the Procurement Council members support this application as well.

Through its partnership with My Blind Spot ("MBS"), the NYPSPS partner in this application, NYSPSP will work to advance equal access to public facing digital data related to employment, education, information, recreation, and independent living opportunities for all New York

residents, including members of the blind and print disabled communities. NYSPSP and MBS employ people who are blind or print disabled, stakeholders reliant on assistive technology with a vested interest and expertise in ensuring accessible, usable, functioning digital platforms. These individuals are New Yorkers themselves, and serve as the best qualified individuals to assess, remedy, and correct unintentional problems imposed by digital barriers.

MBS and NYSPSP have successfully delivered digital accessibility governance services to state and local agencies under their discretionary purchasing thresholds and are able to deliver the same services to the digital infrastructures across all governmental subdivisions in New York State. The NYSPSP and MBS partnership in delivering digital accessibility governance services is a natural complement to New York State's existing policy on digital inclusion and accessibility, and will undoubtedly assist ITS and other New York State government entities in fulfilling this promise. Additionally, this digital accessibility governance initiative continues New York's legacy of inclusiveness by helping ensure that all New Yorkers have equal, barrier-free access to and use of digitized platforms, communications and information, to that of their nondisabled peers.

This letter is to convey ITS' support of NYSPSP's *Digital Accessibility and Usability Testing Services* application.

Respectfully,

Robert H. Samson
Chief Information Officer

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