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COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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MAY 3 1 1973

U The Honorable Tom Railsback
House of Representatives

R Dear Mr. Railsback:

Your April 12, 1973, letter requests that we investigate information in correspondence from Mr. George T. Nickolas, Co-Chairman of the Bi-State Committee on Employment and Services for the Handicapped, concerning the accessibility to the handicapped of buildings contracted, approved, and constructed with Federal funds.

Public Law 90-480, enacted on August 12, 1968, provides that buildings financed with Federal funds be so designed and constructed as to be accessible to the physically handicapped. Privately owned residential structures and military facilities intended primarily for use by able-bodied military personnel are excluded.

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The law authorizes the General Services Administration (GSA), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Department of Defense (DOD), in consultation with the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), to prescribe standards for design, construction, and alteration, as necessary, to insure that physically handicapped persons will have ready access to, and use of, such buildings. GSA, HUD, and DOD are authorized to conduct surveys and investigations to insure compliance with the standards.

GSA is responsible for the construction and management of most Federal public buildings; and, in accordance with the legislation, it has prescribed certain standards for designing, constructing, and altering buildings, of which the following is a part:

"* * * every building designed, constructed, or altered after September 2, 1969, shall be designed, constructed, or altered in accordance with the minimum standards contained in the 'American Standard Specifications for Making Buildings and Facilities Accessible to, and Usable by, the Physically Handicapped, Number A117.1 - 1961,' approved by the

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American Standards Association, Inc. (subsequently changed to American National Standards Institute, Inc.)."

Mr. Nickolas stated that several new Federal buildings in Washington, D.C., recently constructed or being constructed, are not accessible to the handicapped. He also mentioned that three federally funded buildings in Rock Island County, Illinois, violate Public Law 90-480.

To determine whether GSA had incorporated in public buildings such features as ramps, water fountains, and rest-rooms for the physically handicapped, we examined the final working drawings for three Federal buildings currently being constructed in Washington, D.C. The three buildings, having an estimated total cost of \$261 million, are the J. Edgar Hoover (FBI) Building, the South Portal Federal Office Building, and the Department of Labor Building. The working drawings show that GSA is adhering to its standards.

Mr. Nickolas did not name the buildings that were not accessible to the handicapped. It is conceivable that the recently constructed buildings to which Mr. Nickolas referred are not accessible to the handicapped because the 1969 GSA standards did not apply to buildings for which bids had already been solicited or for which plans and specifications had been completed or substantially completed on or before September 2, 1969, the effective date of the GSA standards.

Mr. Nickolas sent a similar letter dated March 9, 1973, to GSA. The Acting Administrator of General Services responded on March 27, 1973, by informing Mr. Nickolas that all Federal buildings in the design or construction stage under GSA's jurisdiction, including six being constructed in Washington, D.C., are accessible to the physically handicapped. He requested Mr. Nickolas to inform GSA of any building in Washington, D.C., or elsewhere, subject to the requirements of Public Law 90-480, which does not comply. In addition, he stated that GSA surveyed about 30 Federal agencies in 1971 and found that their buildings either complied or would comply by the time the buildings were completed.

A GSA official told us on May 3, 1973, that Mr. Nickolas had not replied to GSA's letter.

HUD and DOD have also issued regulations to make federally funded buildings accessible to the handicapped. HUD has applied the American National Standards Institute, Inc.,

Standard A117.1 to its Low-Rent Public Housing Program, the College Housing Programs, the Neighborhood Facilities Program, and the Open Space Land Program. HUD has also extended the standard to certain housing under its mortgage insurance programs. Likewise, DOD has adopted the standard for such military facilities as air terminals, chapels, administrative offices, and theaters.

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We have also received requests from Senators Adlai E. Stevenson and Harold E. Hughes to investigate the statements contained in Mr. Nickolas' correspondence and we are furnishing them with a similar report.

We did not ask DOD, GSA, HEW, or HUD to formally comment on this report, nor did we send copies of the report to those agencies.

Sincerely yours,


Comptroller General
of the United States