

December 1, 2005

Governor Mitt Romney
State House
Room 360
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Re: ITD ODF Policy

Dear Governor Romney:

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has long based its beneficent governance on the pillars of openness and inclusiveness. For nearly 400 years, these hallmarks have worked to make the Commonwealth a shining example for others to follow. Recently, however, a policy proposed by your administration – e.g., your OpenDocument Format (ODF) plan – threatens to rollback some of this rich tradition. The undersigned parties, representing members from the IT, disabled, and public interest communities urge ODF's swift rejection. It will "red-line" a broad swath of Commonwealth citizens, potentially shutting them off from communicating through information technology (IT) with your office and other essential organs of the state.

Over the past 25 years, we have become an IT-dependent society. Little goes on without the aid of IT because it makes our lives better. Governments, being part of this tide, have also come to rely on IT. Public safety, administration of citizen benefits, daily management of tax revenues, etc. all depend on IT applications to ensure that limited taxpayer funds find their best use.

One of the most important aspects of IT involves its role in fostering the communication of citizens with their elected officials and associated bureaucracy. On its face, the ODF policy seeks to further this goal. By January 2007, the Commonwealth's executive agencies have been instructed to switch to "ODF-compliant" desktop applications, ostensibly to increase access to Commonwealth documents both prospectively and retrospectively.

Certainly, the goal must be commended. However, the policy will achieve the opposite.

For the disabled community, in particular, the ODF plan will thrust essential applications off of the "menu list" of communications tools, leaving them largely without the means to communicate with, or work within, much of the Commonwealth's governing structure. Because "ODF-compliance" cannot be reconciled with many proprietary offerings, other constituencies, too – such as the aged, those lacking proper means, schools and libraries, and individuals and

businesses in rural locales, among others – also stand to be cut off from the democratic process and its multitudinous benefits by your policy.

This does not need to occur.

The previous plan kept the full palette of solutions open. Through inclusion, it allowed your Information and Technology Department (ITD) to flexibly choose from what the market was producing. It looked agnostically and holistically at technology without picking winners and losers. In doing so, it allowed such communities like the disabled community to participate in the democratic process, to have and create jobs and prosper.

The Commonwealth remains a beacon of light for the world, illuminating the path of democracy, as well as that of technological advancement. The ODF policy, though well-intentioned, fails both. Accordingly, we urge you to reverse the ODF policy, which we believe will work to disenfranchise Commonwealth citizens through its lack of technological neutrality, openness and inclusiveness.

Sincerely,

Bay State Council of the Blind
Disability Policy Consortium
Initiative for Software Choice
National Cristina Foundation