



2022 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ADVISORY BOARD ON THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

2022 Members of The Advisory Board on the Americans with Disabilities Act

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Chief Court Administrator, Chair**

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Ms. Deanna L. Dorkins, Court Support Services Division
Ms. Kathleen Gensheimer, Administrative Services Division
Ms. Kristen Giantonio, Information Technology Division
Ms. Sandra Lugo Ginés, Superior Court Operations Division
Attorney Paul Hartan, Supreme & Appellate Courts
Mr. Michael Hines, Court Support Services Division
Ms. Laura Jovino, Administrative Services Division
Mr. Michael Knapp, Judicial Marshal Services
Attorney Deirdre McPadden, Judge Support Services
Attorney Lee Ross, External Affairs Division

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**2022 Annual Report to
Chief Justice Richard A. Robinson
From
The Advisory Board on the Americans with Disabilities Act**

The Advisory Board on the Americans with Disabilities Act was established in 2011 as the successor to the Public Service and Trust Commission's ADA Committee, as part of the first goal of the Strategic Plan. That goal, "*The Judicial Branch will provide equal access to all of its facilities, processes and information through the identification and elimination of barriers,*" drives the Branch to continue to ensure compliance with the ADA.

Chief Court Administrator Judge Patrick L. Carroll III chaired the Board since its inception. At the end of 2022, Judge Carroll took Senior Judge status; his successor, Judge Elizabeth A. Bozzuto, has assumed the role of Chair of the Board.

Board membership includes representatives from all five Divisions and the Supreme and Appellate courts, to ensure that the Branch's commitment to accessibility is established across all divisions and units. In 2022, Board members Mr. Charles Epstein, from Superior Court Operations' Judicial Marshal Services Unit, and Atty. Brittany Kaplan, of the External Affairs Division, completed their service on the Board. Judge Bozzuto and the remaining members of the Board extend their appreciation to Charlie and Brittany for their service. Further, Judge Bozzuto and the members welcome new members: Atty. Lee Ross, a Deputy Director in the External Affairs Division, and Mr. Michael Knapp, Deputy Chief Judicial Marshal in the Judicial Marshal Services Unit.

Since 2016, the Judicial Branch has consistently been ranked by the Justice Index - a project of the National Center for Access to Justice that evaluates every state and the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico for ADA compliance and other accessibility issues - in the top three states for accessibility for people with disabilities. Judge Carroll has helped ensure that consistently high ranking through his belief that the continued focus on ensuring equal access for people with disabilities helps sustain the Branch's overall mission to "*serve the interests of justice and the public by resolving matters brought before it in a fair, timely, efficient and open manner.*"

Under Judge Carroll's leadership over the last dozen years, the Board has made recommendations and ensured implementation of projects Branch-wide, including improvements to facilities, such as to restrooms; expanding the availability of online information, such as forms, brochures, and videos; making available audio recordings of proceedings as an ADA accommodation; and the creation and implementation of ADA-related training.

Judge Carroll believed strongly that training for Branch employees would be key to ensuring accessibility to our programs and processes and has consistently approved the development of a variety of trainings, such as "*The Nuts and Bolts of the ADA.*" The class was originally taught in person for local ADA Contacts, but Judge Carroll and the Board believed all staff would benefit from learning about the ADA and the Branch's responsibilities to ensuring access for people with disabilities under Title II. An online version was launched and in 2019, the Chief Court Administrator made it mandatory for all employees.

As part of the Branch's Mandatory Education requirements, new hires must complete the training within three months of employment.

The members of the Advisory Board, its legal advisors, and the staff of the Centralized ADA Office would like to extend their deep appreciation to Judge Carroll for his guidance and support over the last 12 years. His leadership has ensured that the Judicial Branch is among the best in the nation in providing access to justice for all people.

The Advisory Board oversees the delivery of ADA services and accommodations to hundreds of members of the public every year to ensure the Branch's ongoing adherence to Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. This report provides an update on last year's recommendations to increase or improve access and offers some new suggestions.

Ongoing Initiatives: Updates

Training

Training of Branch employees is critical to ensuring that people with disabilities can access our programs, processes, and services. From Judicial Marshals at courthouse metal detectors, to Court Clerk's offices, Probation offices, Court Service Centers, and Law Libraries, to the Information Technology Division, which maintains the Branch's internal and external online presence, Branch staff have access to a wide variety of ADA-related training. In addition to the basics about the legal requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, staff have opportunities to take part in trainings that relate to the human experience of living with disability.

The Judicial Branch has 140-plus trained local ADA Contacts. These staff are in every division, and many different units. The Centralized ADA Office helps to ensure that these Contacts are well-trained in our policies and procedures, providing both mandatory and refresher training.

In 2022, the Judicial Branch conducted ADA training for hundreds of its employees, including:

- *The Nuts and Bolts of the ADA* is an overview of the Act and its requirements and provides information on how to assist members of the public to secure an accommodation. Developed by the Centralized ADA Office, this training is mandatory for all new employees, and must be completed within three months of employment. In 2022, this online class was completed by 410 employees. Additionally, the External Affairs Division's Experiential Learning Program saw 140 interns complete this program as part of their training.
- *Service Animals 101*, a Branch-created training, provides information based on the U.S. Department of Justice Service Animal guidelines. This training is mandatory for all new hires in the Judicial Marshal Services Unit and is available for all Branch employees. Last year, 255 Branch employees completed the training.

- In 2022, Judicial Marshal Services provided training to 108 new hires and existing staff. In addition to the online *Nuts and Bolts* and *Service Animals 101* courses, the Judicial Marshal Academy (JMA) provides staff-taught classes including *Hearing Voices that are Distressing* and *Prisoners with Special Needs*.
- The New England ADA Center offers two online courses available to Judicial Branch employees: *Overview of Disability Rights Law*, and *Fair Housing Act, Section 504 and the ADA*. In 2022, 60 employees completed these online trainings.
- The Court Support Services Division continues its extensive training, with 289 CSSD staff completing courses including the online *Fair Housing*; *Overview of Disability Rights Law*; *Service Animals 101*; *the Speaker Series*; *the Nuts and Bolts*, *Successful Interactions with Clients with Hidden Disabilities*; and *Advanced Training for ADA Contacts*.
- Court Support Services also conducted their own training, presenting two classes: *Autism and Criminal Justice: When the Two Worlds Collide*, and *An Overview of Autism Spectrum Disorders*, to 45 employees in the Division.
- The Centralized ADA Office has provided remote training on the basics of the ADA to two dozen Call Center employees, many of whom are new Branch hires. This training will continue in 2023.
- New ADA Contacts are provided extensive written information upon appointment, and work closely with the three Judicial District liaisons in the Centralized ADA Office.
- Advanced Training for ADA Contacts was presented remotely four times in 2022. In all, 91 local Contacts completed the course. The mandatory course is designed to ensure that Contacts are well-versed in the Branch's policies, procedures, and services, including those for support people in proceedings both public and private and when a Confidentiality Agreement is necessary, as well as medical documentation and service animal policies.
- Prior to the pandemic, the Centralized ADA Office created "*Speaker Series: Interacting with Respect is Everyone's Job.*" These sessions featured people with disabilities discussing the challenges they encounter in everyday life, including navigating the court system, as well as disability culture, etiquette and terminology. Past speakers have been people living with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other hidden disabilities, as well as a program about Deaf culture that was conducted at the American School for the Deaf in West Hartford. The program was suspended due to the pandemic. However, the Speaker Series was reinstated, by remote learning, in September 2022. More than 40 Judicial Branch employees attended a presentation by the Centralized ADA Office with New Horizons CFO and two residents of this housing community in Farmington for people with disabilities. The residents shared their experiences about living with disabilities, and how those in the public sector can best serve people with disabilities.
- All newly appointed Judges and Family Support Magistrates participated in ADA training during Pre-Bench Orientation.
- Members of the Centralized ADA Office were able to virtually attend the 2022 National ADA Symposium, an initiative of the National ADA Network. Classes attended included Accessible design in Websites and Facilities; Reasonable Accommodations; Approaches in Ensuring Effective Communications; Role of the ADA Coordinator; Disability Language and Etiquette; and Top Title II Court Cases in 2021.

Facilities

Over the past year, ADA building assessments of public, staff and detention areas have continued to occur. Improvements are identified by three categories:

- work to be completed by in-house maintenance staff,
- minor work to be completed by trade labor contractors, and
- capital improvement projects.

The remaining ten courthouses are on track to be completed by Fall 2023.

Additionally, the arraignment court at GA-14 Hartford has been selected as a pilot site to modify the seating in order to designate wheelchair space and companion seating. The first bench has been removed and is currently being resized and refinished. Once reinstalled, floor signage will designate a space for wheelchair seating and companion seating signage will be installed on the bench. The work was coordinated with the Clerk's Office, Judicial Marshal Services, and the Centralized ADA Office.

Elevator modernizations have been prioritized in the Branch's project schedule over the past two years. Since a modernization takes approximately three months per car, while construction is underway, site selection and design start in the next site. Two public elevators in New Britain are complete, and in Middletown two public and one staff car were completed in February. GA-14 in Hartford is in the design phase for their three public elevators with funding already in place for construction. All elevator modernizations include ADA signage (Braille) and audio annunciators.

Information

- The Interpreter and Translator Services Unit translated the *Procedure for Members of the Public to Request an Accommodation Under the Americans with Disabilities Act* into [Spanish](#), [Portuguese](#), and [Polish](#).
- Over the last year, the Information Technology Division, Appellate System, Legal Services, and the Centralized ADA Office have begun the process of publishing an online version of the Practice Book that is compatible with software that can help provide individuals with certain disabilities, such as impaired vision, with a fully accessible version of the Practice Book.
- Information Technology Division Developers check websites using the Lighthouse tool (with a focus on Jud.ct.gov and other external websites). The Lighthouse tool provides an indexed score on Accessibility as well as other data points. The Division is modernizing its tools to help developers and testers utilize best practices in several areas including Accessibility.

Future Initiatives

Training

- 1) The Judicial Branch has been assessing its Request for Accommodation process. It is expected that changes will be made. As a result, the CAO will be developing revised training for all Judges and Branch staff. It will be presented in 2023.

- 2) The Administrative Services Division will continue to provide Title I training to supervisors.
- 3) Training will be provided to the Appellate Clerk's Office on identifying ADA requests that are presented as medical conditions/needs in filings.

Information

- 1) The Judicial Branch will develop a brochure for members of the Bar on Title II of the ADA including information on how to request an accommodation.
- 2) When changes to the revised Request for Accommodation process are finalized, those changes will require forms to be revised, processes to be memorialized, and web pages to be updated. These changes will occur in 2023. Additionally, any items in need of translation to Spanish, Portuguese, and Polish will be translated.

Facilities

- 1) The ADA courthouse assessments will be completed by the fall of 2023. In total, 38 courthouses will have been extensively assessed, for everything from restroom accessibility, to door hardware, to elevators, and juror boxes.
- 2) Elevator modernizations will continue Branch-wide, with the Hartford GA at 101 Lafayette Street in place for this ongoing initiative. All elevator modernizations include ADA signage (Braille) and audio annunciators.