



2024 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ADVISORY BOARD ON THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

2024 Members of The Advisory Board on the Americans with Disabilities Act

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**2024 Annual Report to
Chief Justice Raheem L. Mullins
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.

Chaired by Chief Court Administrator Judge Elizabeth A. Bozzuto, the ADA Board membership includes representatives from all five Divisions and the Supreme and Appellate courts.

Since the Board’s last report to Chief Justice Robinson in the spring of 2024 for its activities in 2023, the Judicial Branch continues to expand its training offerings for all staff; improve its access to facilities including signage and elevator modifications; improved access to the Branch’s web materials, web pages and mobile applications, as well as ADA-related documents. These are discussed more fully, below.

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 continues to be a major component of the Judicial Branch’s continued compliance with both the letter and the spirit of the law. From Judges and Magistrates, to Court Clerks and Court Monitors, Probation Officers and Family Relations, Judicial Marshals, administrative staff, and in all Divisions, thousands of hours of training is completed every year. The Branch also requires all newly hired employees to complete two ADA-related classes within six months of hire: *Service Animals 101*, and *The Nuts & Bolts of the ADA*. Additionally, every Branch staff member is required to complete the *Nuts & Bolts* online training annually.

Overall, the calendar year of 2024 resulted in the following completions of online ADA classes, including instructor led-remote classes:

- 1) The Nuts and Bolts of the ADA: 3,854
- 2) Service Animals 101: 293
- 3) Overview of Disability Rights Law: 14
- 4) Fair Housing Act, Section 504, and the ADA: 38
- 5) Speaker Series: Interacting with Respect is Everyone’s Job: 17
- 6) Perspectives and Possibilities: 26.

7) The Experiential Learning Program saw 257 interns complete the Nuts and Bolts as part of their orientation and training.

Training Highlights

- During Pre-Bench Orientation in spring 2024, all newly appointed Judges and Family Support Magistrates participated in comprehensive ADA training focused on Title II of the Act, specifically on the concepts of reasonable accommodation and fundamental alteration of the process. Additionally, the Chief Administrative Judge of the Civil Division invited managers of the Centralized ADA Office to address Judges at the Civil Division, Fall Program.
- In 2024, 648 Judicial Marshal Services (JMS) staff members completed the *Nuts and Bolts* training, while another 65 completed *Service Animals*. Additionally, 51 new Judicial Marshal Trainees received training in courses that are ADA-specific or have ADA components. These courses include *Hearing Voices That Are Distressing* and *Prisoners with Special Needs*. In all, Judicial Marshal Academy instructors last year presented the *Hearing Voices* class to 60 JMS staff and another 45 Branch employees from outside that unit, at the request of the Centralized ADA Office.
- The Court Support Services Division continues its extensive training model for its staff. In 2024, 1,455 staff completions were made in the online *Fair Housing; Overview of Disability Rights Law; Service Animals 101*; the *Speaker Series*; the *Nuts and Bolts of the ADA*; and *Perspectives and Possibilities*.
- The Centralized ADA Office (CAO) in 2024 developed the *Perspectives and Possibilities* class, a remote, instructor-led interactive training. This new training is facilitated by CAO staff who lead a discussion about attitudes and perceptions of people with disabilities and disability in general. This class is being presented quarterly in 2025.
- All staff in the External Affairs Division completed the *Nuts and Bolts* refresher, as did staff at the Supreme and Appellate Courts.
- CAO staff presented a class on the ADA under Title II specific to the Judicial Branch, including our request process, review of ADA policies, procedures, and forms, and information on making requests, at the Litchfield County Bar Association's CLE day for its members attorneys.

Facilities

During 2024, the Facilities Unit continued to gather information for the ongoing building assessment project. Tasks for each courthouse were compiled into a single database and is currently being assigned a cost estimate. The database will be updated as work is completed and allow for a fuller picture of ADA-related work. A cellblock restroom in the GA courthouse at Bridgeport was completed, and design is underway for ADA improvement to the front entry at the Middlesex Judicial District courthouse. The Unit's elevator modernization program, which includes the installation of Braille signage and audio annunciators, continues.

The Facilities Unit worked with the IT and Superior Court Operations' divisions on the creation of the Branch's first digital courtroom. Accessibility features include an ADA-accessible podium for attorneys that is wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair, and features an adjustable shelf, and gallery floor space for a wheelchair user and an adjacent companion seat.

Information Technology

In April 2024, the Federal Register published the Department of Justice's final rule updating its regulations for Title II of the Act. The final rule has specific requirements about how to ensure that web content and mobile applications are accessible to people with disabilities. This rule will help make sure people with disabilities have access to state and local governments' services, programs, and activities available on websites and mobile apps. The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Version 2.1, Level AA is the technical standard for state and local governments' web content and mobile apps. This rule sets a specific technical standard that state and local governments must follow to meet their existing obligations under Title II of the ADA for web and mobile app accessibility. (A fact sheet can be found at this URL: <https://www.ada.gov/resources/2024-03-08-web-rule/>).

- The Branch's Information Technology Division has begun its work to organize the effort needed to address the new rule regarding Web Content Accessibility compliance for all Branch web and mobile applications. A subcommittee of the Branch's internal Web Board has been formed with project leads from the ITD unit, along with key stakeholders in the various divisions, legal services, and a member of the Branch's Centralized ADA Office. A SharePoint site has been created for the subcommittee and others identified in the divisions that will be responsible for reporting progress on the initiative. Technical resources and information on the WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guideline) compliance standards are also available. The committee is in the process of finalizing a survey that will be sent Branch wide to each Division's application leads and/or project managers that will allow the committee to capture how many applications will be impacted. The committee has decided that those applications identified as part of Title II of the ADA will be prioritized first (these would be publicly facing applications versus applications used for internal judicial use only). Based on a recommendation from ITD, developers can add the WAVE tool in their browser as the preferred tool to use to identify if a website is compliant. However, third party software is also being researched to assist with those application areas that have an extensive number of websites/webpages. Third party software will allow a scan of the entire website application versus using the WAVE tool page by page. Both approaches will be needed to attempt to complete the work by the compliance date of April of 2026.

Information and Collaboration

- The Centralized ADA Office in Superior Court Operations serves as the gatekeeper to ADA requests, assessing each request for eligibility and then directing those requests to the Court for decision if they are Judicial Accommodations, or working with local field staff to implement Administrative Accommodations, such as sign language. The office works collaboratively with all Divisions and the Supreme and Appellate Courts, often through local ADA Contacts. Training for new Contacts is done on an as-needed basis. In 2024, the CAO worked with Supreme and Appellate

Court staff who process filings and other communications that reference the ADA directly or indirectly, through the courts' ADA Contact. The Supreme and Appellate court staff are in continuous contact with the CAO to make sure ADA requests are processed in accordance with Branch policy.

- Law Library Services continued to maintain and update information on the ADA Resources page of the Judicial Branch website. In addition, Law Library Services continued to maintain and update Law by Subject pages and Research Guides pertinent to the ADA including service animals, Dog Law in Connecticut, and Comfort and Support Dogs for Witnesses.

Future Initiatives

Training

- 1) The Administrative Services Division will continue to provide Title I training to supervisors.
- 2) The Centralized ADA Office will continue its efforts at training all Branch staff, with offerings to include the Perspectives online class, as well as the Speaker Series.
- 3) Beginning in 2025, Judicial Branch policy requires that all employees must complete 10 hours of training, including a minimum of two credit hours focused on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

Information Technology

The Commission on Legal Publications (COLP) is currently working with a contracted software engineer to remove the Connecticut Practice Book (and all other COLP publications) from the legacy Miles33 system to a more updated system. Templates are being created that are utilizing ADA compliant tagging within industry standard Adobe InDesign. As templates are created, COLP is using Adobe Pro to test for compliance. The sheer size of the Practice Book makes this a daunting task, but once the initial fully compliant version is created, the new editions produced annually will be easy to maintain going forward since ADA tagging will be built within the document(s).

Facilities

A bid was awarded for the elevator modernization project. A four-elevator project will begin in Hartford at the courthouse at 101 Lafayette Street in the spring, and design is underway to modernize two public elevators in the Danbury JD, with bids expected to go out in the summer.

The Unit continues to work with on-site facility supervisors to make improvements to such things as proper clearances for counsel tables, ease of use improvements to bathroom facilities, and improving parking signage where appropriate.

A signage template was approved by the Chief Court Administrator. Signage includes proper font and Braille and was installed to code-required heights in the Norwalk facility and Hartford Juvenile Court, and the Unit will be tackling a few buildings at a time this calendar year, making all reasonable upgrades.

Also in 2025, a project at the 90 Washington Street, Hartford courthouse will include adding handicapped parking spaces and curb cuts on Washington Street.