



COMPLIANCE@WORK

An educational resource for Legislative Branch employees and employers to help understand workplace rights and legal responsibilities under the Congressional Accountability Act of 1995

ACCESS ON CAPITOL HILL: ADA WITHIN THE HALLS OF CONGRESS

Employment
Law Series

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It is estimated that one in five Americans is living with a disability.

July 26, 2015 marked the 25th anniversary of the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Tremendous changes have occurred in workplaces throughout America since the passage of the ADA. The focus has turned to people's abilities rather than disabilities, identifying and removing barriers to access rather than ignoring them, and providing reasonable workplace accommodations rather than denying employment opportunities. The Congressional Accountability Act of 1995 (CAA) established the Office of Compliance (OOC) to administer workplace laws like the ADA for employees and visitors to the Capitol complex.

OFFICE OF COMPLIANCE AND THE ADA: IMPROVING ACCESS

For Legislative Branch employees, both on the Hill and in state and district offices, the OOC provides resources for understanding ADA rights under the CAA. The OOC works cooperatively with the Architect of the Capitol (AOC) to improve access for those with hearing, vision, and physical disabilities whether they are meeting a Member of Congress, visiting the Botanic Garden, or simply touring the Capitol grounds. The OOC inspects Legislative Branch facilities, including buildings, offices, sidewalks, and entrances, and recommends solutions for removing barriers to public and employee access.

CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE ADA AND DISABILITY AWARENESS ON THE HILL

Fifty-four Members of the House sit on the Bipartisan Disabilities Caucus, championing the rights of people with physical, intellectual, and developmental disabilities every day. There is strong support for the ADA from Members of both the House and Senate. Many Members have personal experiences with disabilities themselves and connections to others with disabilities. Today, Members and staff alike are benefiting from rights afforded to them by the ADA under the CAA. In addition to increased governmental focus on public access issues, other organizations such as the MS Society and the National Federation for the Blind connect Members of Congress with the public by holding awareness events on Capitol Hill.



After suffering a stroke in 2012 and returning to the Senate a year later, I know firsthand how important the ADA is to elevating the independence of the 50 million other Americans living with a disability. Laws like the ADA, as covered under the CAA, make the U.S. Capitol accessible to all Americans and make it easier for me to work in the Senate for the people of Illinois.

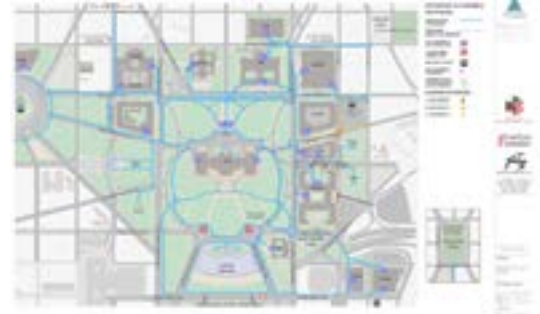
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ACCESSING CAPITOL HILL

In the final report for the 112th Congress, a total of 398 barriers to access for people with disabilities were detected among the Library of Congress and Senate Office Buildings. Of those barriers, 50% posed safety concerns due to substantial deviations from the ADA requirements. The majority of those barriers dealt with curb ramps that were too steep to meet the ADA standards, and irregular sidewalk surfaces caused by cracks, holes, raised or depressed slabs, and gaps in expansion joints.



Working with the OOC, the AOC developed a strategy to remove these barriers to accessibility. The AOC looked at each barrier and assessed it based on four different criteria including time and money required to fix the barrier. Using this assessment, as of July 1, 2015, approximately 73% of the barriers discovered by the OOC during the 111th Congress, and 61% of the barriers identified during the 112th Congress, have been removed by the AOC. The AOC has also now identified an accessible pathway from each of the public transportation drop-off points to each of the buildings on Capitol Hill. This accessible pathway map is a useful tool for those employees and visitors with disabilities needing to navigate their way safely around Capitol Hill.



A MEMBER'S POINT OF VIEW – CONGRESSMAN JIM LANGEVIN (2-RI)

When I arrived in 2000, as the first quadriplegic ever to serve in the House of Representatives, some changes had to be made to accommodate my service. The historic buildings of the Capitol weren't built with today's accessibility standards in mind. But under the leadership of both Republicans and Democrats, there has been a strong commitment to making the Capitol complex more accessible to Members of Congress, staff and visitors.

We have seen the installation of ramps and push-button doors in various offices and committee rooms, the House floor has been redesigned with new lecterns and seating, we've enhanced the accessibility of technology and websites, and improved our emergency preparedness plans to incorporate the needs of individuals with disabilities. On the 20th Anniversary of the ADA, I was extremely honored to become the first quadriplegic to preside over the House of Representatives through accommodations made to the Speaker's rostrum.

However, our work is not done. The Capitol complex can and should be made more widely accessible, beginning with automatic push-button door openers – especially in the vestibules and hallways. Every committee room should be redesigned with accessibility in mind, so makeshift ramps don't have to be built and placed according to a specific Member's committee assignment. We also need more accessible public bathrooms, improved signage, expanded ASL and CART transcription services for the deaf and hard of hearing, and we must continue to update our emergency preparedness plans to better incorporate people with disabilities. I believe these improvements are achievable with the appropriate planning and resources. Where barriers exist, so do the opportunities to remove them thanks to the protections and accommodations afforded under the ADA and the CAA.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE ADA AND CAA

The OOC provides an [ADA Office Checklist](#) which can be used by Congressional offices to help identify and remove common barriers to access. In the coming months, the OOC will launch its online training course on the ADA as it relates to access and accommodations. This training course and additional information on how to make an office more accessible to visitors and all Legislative Branch employees can be found by visiting our website at www.compliance.gov, or by calling us at 202-724-9250 and speaking to an inspector.