

## CONCLUSION

The State Bar of Arizona, Committee on Persons with Disabilities in the Legal Profession, presents the following concluding comments on the Arizona Courthouse Accessibility Survey.

### Highlights of Each Court Visit

As stated in the Introduction, one of the goals of the survey was to share information about what kinds of accommodations work well, particularly those relatively inexpensive and readily integrated into existing buildings. The Committee's belief is that by sharing information about successful accommodations, information will be disseminated in the most positive and supportive manner possible. By emphasizing, even "celebrating" successful approaches to accessibility, the Committee believes that Court staff charged with operating facilities which potentially could be more accessible, will bring new insights, perspective and energy to that effort.

The following is a list of one or two accessibility "highlights" from each courthouse surveyed. Again, we thank all of the Court staff who gave so freely of their time to participate in this effort.

**1) Flagstaff Justice Court.** "The facility includes two justice court courtrooms, one of which is rigged for assisted listening devices."

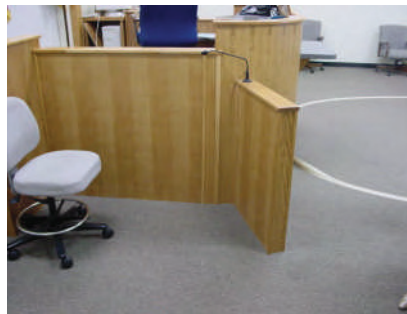


**2) Glendale Justice Court.** "The courtroom for the Glendale Justice Court is courtroom 1. This courtroom has a spot in the public gallery for a wheelchair. There is wide access and no problem with the gate separating the public gallery from the court well where counsels' tables are placed."

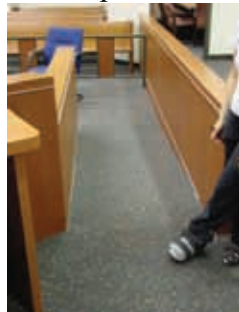
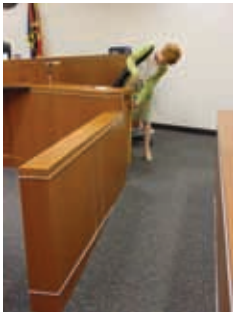
3) **Lake Havasu City Justice Court.** “The clerk’s counter was cut to a height that a person using a wheelchair could access, with a height that would permit a wheelchair to fit under.”



4) **Maryvale Justice Court.** “The outstanding feature in this courtroom, and the first encountered since the commencement of the site visits, is the witness stand. There is no step up to the stand; it is on the same level as the rest of the courtroom, making it totally accessible. There are 33 inches between the jury box and the witness stand, thus allowing easy access for those using mobility assistive devices.”



5) **Scottsdale Justice Court.** “The courtroom design is one of the best observed, particularly for a justice court. A ramp leads to the witness stand and jury box, with a wall and railing on the ‘well side’ of the ramp [...] There was no swinging gate separating the public gallery from the courtroom well, the absence of which is more convenient for persons with mobility impairments. The jury box had only removable chairs, which could easily accommodate a wheelchair [...] For any juror or witness requiring hearing assistance, the court has wireless headphones. All courtrooms are set up for hearing assistance.”



6) **Gilbert Justice Court.** “Justice Courtroom Number 2. It was similar in design and very accessible. A ramp also led to the jury box, with spring, theater style seats and substantial room to permit a wheelchair user to participate. There was no gallery door into the well, and there was substantial space in the gallery to permit observation by several persons using wheelchairs.”



7) **City of St. John Justice Court.** “The Justice Courtroom is simply outstanding. One bench had been removed the gallery to accommodate persons utilizing mobility assistive devices. There is a ramp to the jury box and to the witness stand. This is a perfect example of the effective construction and use of ramps in the courtroom – a model that could easily and relatively inexpensively be replicated in courtrooms across the state.”



8) **Safford Justice Court.** “The Justice Court Courtroom was essentially accessible, once again demonstrating that the more basic the elements, the more generally accessible is the facility. There was no jury box, with four rows of ordinary chair supplying that instead, any of which could be removed or moved to accommodate a person with a mobility limitation or wheelchair. The same was true for the table and chairs constituting counsel’s table.”



9) **Gilbert Municipal Court.** There was much from which to choose. “Municipal Courtroom 3. Its exterior hallway sign was in Braille [...] The hallway doors into the courtroom swing open well beyond 90 degrees, which made the tension on them much more desirable than doors that reach their maximum opening at 90 degrees. The tension on the doors was reasonable [...] The passageway from the courtroom gallery for the public and the well of the courtroom did not have a swinging door [...] The witness box had an easy slope, with rails [...] A ramp also led to the jury box, with spring, theater style seating. These would generally permit inclusion of a wheelchair in the jury box.” Also, “the men’s locker room was fully accessible, with an accessible toilet staff and low-height urinal. One of the shower stalls had a spring bench, shower ‘snake,’ grab bars and a same level shower stall floor.”



10) **Phoenix Municipal Court.** Again, there was much from which to choose. “There is an extensive selection of pamphlets available, in both English and Spanish, as well as in large print, describing services of the courthouse for members of the public, including for persons with disabilities [...] The informational display was prominent and extremely helpful.” Also, “in the first courtroom visited, the jury box had an interesting, built-in ramp, which required assistance to open up for a wheelchair user to access the box. It was low cost, but it did require someone other than the wheelchair user to gain access. The entryway in to the jury box was wide enough for a team member using a standard size motorized wheelchair to enter, and the grade of slope was quite reasonable.”





**11) Tucson Municipal Court.** “There are several offices of note on the first floor, including a public services office that impressed the team. This large office has automatic door openers and numerous public cubicle counters positioned at a fully accessible height.”

**12) Apache County Superior Court.** “There is a ramp extending from the main walkway to the front door of the courthouse. It is interesting to note that the ramp was an addition installed around 1980, 10 years prior to the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act.”



**13) Cochise County Superior Court.** “There were several computer cubicles in the library. One cubicle was quite accessible with an easy, “straight-in” entrance.” Also, the front row of the jury box has space for a wheelchair and the floor is flat, allowing access.”



**14) Coconino County Superior Court.** “Division 3 (Presiding Judge H. Jeffrey Coker’s Courtroom) was the highlight of the survey. Division 3 is the Historic Courtroom located in the Old Courthouse. This is a completely accessible courtroom with appropriate ramps. The swinging door gates have been removed and replaced with a swag rope that separates the public from the courtroom’s well.” Also, “the first floor restrooms were rated highly by Council Member



White and Mr. Micole Shorty. Among other positive points, both noted that there was ample sink access for persons in wheelchairs, and the pipes under the sink were PCB pipes, thereby ensuring that a person in a wheelchair would not be burned rolling up against a hot water pipe, or hit their wheelchair or legs on the hard pipes [...]. The faucets had lever-type handles making them easy to use.”

**15) Gila County Superior Court.** “The smaller courtroom is very well situated for persons with disabilities. The jury box front row is accessible as are counsel tables and the witness chair [...]. Headsets are available for augmenting hearing for those with an auditory disability.”



**16) Graham County Superior Court.** “The elevator is large, with a railing inside. There was sufficient room in the elevator for entry and mobility, and the elevators had a non-slip, rubber tile surface that was extremely safe and functional. The buttons were placed at appropriate heights. The Elevator Floor indicators outside the elevator were in Braille.” Also, “the law library is located on the bottom floor and was quite functional for a person using a wheelchair or generally having mobility limitations. The library is open to both staff and members of the public. The library was moved to the bottom floor because of the heavy weight of the books, reflecting the degree to which the courthouse staff was working with an older structure. It has a fully accessible water fountain at wheelchair height and electronic research facilities. A large banner was prominently displayed in the library for a Court Appointed Special Advocate, with a telephone number, with a scope of assistance that presumably would benefit person with disabilities.”



17) **Greenlee County Superior Court.** “There is one elevator in the courthouse. It easily accommodates an individual utilizing a wheelchair or scooter. The buttons are at a low level and Braille signs were evident.” Also, the upper level restrooms, which used to house two stalls, now feature one toilet (no stall) which provides more than ample space to accommodate a wheelchair user. Towel and soap dispensers are at two levels and grab bars are available. The doors have wing handles.”



18) **La Paz County Superior Court - Parker Facility.** The “[public] restrooms are very spacious and maneuverable. The accessible stall in the women’s restroom includes bars and its own sink, making use very convenient. All sinks had small wing handles, which would allow for easier use by individuals with mobility limitations. Boxes that hid pipes under the counters were appropriately sloped to allows for greater access by wheelchair users.” Also, “the Superior Court courtroom is a large and stately looking room. A real plus immediately noted by the team was the installation of a voice amplification system to assist individuals with hearing disabilities.”



19) **Maricopa County Superior Court (downtown facility, old courthouse).** “Upon approaching this beautiful old building, good signage directs people to the accessible ramped entrance. Once inside, there is a ramp from lower ground level to first floor and the elevators.”





**20) Maricopa County Superior Court (downtown facility, new courthouse, all three towers).** “The remodeled courtrooms all have a ramp to the jury box and witness stand. The ramp is fixed in place and does not need to be folded out.”



**21) Maricopa County Superior Court – City of Mesa.** “Each restroom had a fully accessible stall. The stall surveyed had full grab bars, and sufficient room in the stall to actually turn a wheelchair around, and keep it in the stall during toilet use. The survey restroom had a low height, unobstructed urinal, which was accessible for someone using a wheelchair.” Also, “in the first courtroom visited, there was an appropriate ramp leading to the witness stand and jury box, which was ideally constructed. The ‘well-side’ edge of the ramp has a visible lip, with a wood ‘cap,’ calling attention to the ramp dimensions for safety reasons.”



**22) Maricopa County Superior Court - City of Surprise.** “In the jury box, there is a [floor level] cut out for a wheelchair, though it is lower than the jury chairs and is not separated from the courtroom by the half-wall. A ramp runs from the floor of the courtroom to the witness box with clear access. A wheelchair fits easily under the desk portion of the witness box.” Also, “all four of these courtrooms are fully electronic, and have very sensitive microphones so that anyone speaking – counsel, witness, judge, can be heard from any point in the courtroom. There are also cordless earphones available.”

**23) Maricopa County Superior Court - City of Glendale.** “There is a public telephone at the far end of the hallway near the restrooms. It was at an appropriate, accessible height. All water fountains that the team saw included a fountain at a wheelchair-accessible height, and all were functional.”

**24) Mohave County Superior Court - Kingman Facility.** “A very positive change that has been made to this older facility is the installation of automatic doors. When in use, the doors stay open for ample time to allow very easy access by persons with disabilities.” Also, “[an] infrared listening system (...) has been installed in the courtrooms. Signage outside the courtrooms alerts persons with hearing impairments that the system is available and, upon request, they are provided with assistive listening devices.”

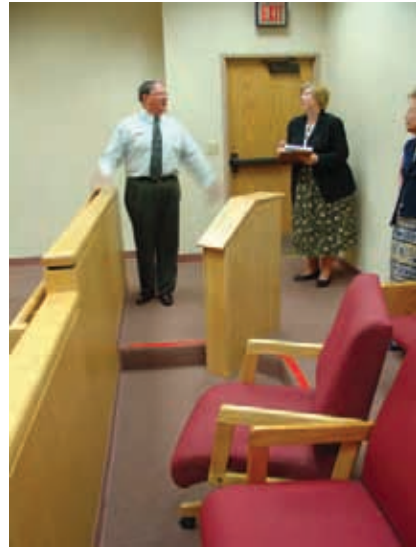


**25) Mohave County Superior Court - Bullhead City.** “Division One Courtroom is entered by jury members via ramps outside the courtroom. There are also ramps to the bench, the witness box, and the jury box, making this a very accessible facility. The jury box holds removable chairs, which allow maximum flexibility and maneuvering.”



**26) Mohave County Superior Court - Lake Havasu City.** “The courtrooms are generally very accessible for both members of the judiciary and the public. There are appropriate ramps leading to the witness stand and jury box. There is no swinging gate separating the public gallery from the courtroom well, which presents a very wide access way to the courtroom well. The

courtroom well is extremely large and function. The courtroom doors were light-tension, with hoop handles that are relatively easy to negotiate.”

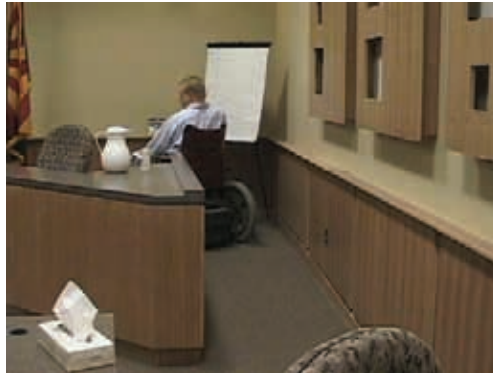


**27) Navajo County Superior Court.** “Courtrooms are located on the first floor. The courtrooms are generally very accessible to members of the judiciary and public. A ramp leads up to the jury box and witness stand, with a railing along the side lip of the ramp. The first row of the jury box has fixed, non-removable seats. A person using a wheelchair would need to simply bring the wheelchair immediately to the side of the first interior jury box chair. The space was sufficient to permit one wheelchair to do so.” Also, access to both the jury deliberation room and the judicial chambers were accessible and at the top of the ramp. There was no gate separating the public gallery from the courtroom well, with wide, open passage. [...] All courtrooms are set up for hearing assistance. Wireless headphones are used for this purpose.”



**28) Pima County Superior Court.** “Jury Assembly Room: this facility is newly constructed and, keeping with the Court’s policy about upgrading during the remodeling process, gets an A+ in every respect. The doorways are wide and automated, as is the aisle space (which provides ample turnaround room). All services are located low enough to be reached by someone in a wheelchair, including front counter tables, computers, water fountain, etc. Listening devices are available for jurors, who receive written notice in advance that accommodations are available

should they be needed.” The Second Floor hearing rooms are also “relatively new construction, [and] get an A+. All three are fully ramped and furniture is moveable, to make accommodations where needed. Although equipped with automatic openers, the doors close slowly and are not too heavy.”



**29) Pinal County Superior Court, old facility.** “Division 3 Courtroom is completely accessible providing full access for the judge, jury, counsel, and witnesses. There is ample room in the gallery and emergency exit access is good.”



**30) Pinal County Superior Court, new facility.** “The Court is to be commended for thoroughly training security personnel to sensitively handle the needs of people with disabilities. All visitors are required to pass through security, however, security personnel appear quick to respond to special issues presented by visitors with disabilities.” Also, “all [ten courtrooms] are accessible for the lawyers, jurors and witnesses. [...] Three of the ten courtrooms have both a lift and ramp for the judge. [...] Chairs are easy to move and there is a ramp to the jury box where there is room for a wheelchair. All ten courtrooms are equipped with Infrared Assisted Listening Systems.”



**31) Santa Cruz County Superior Court.** “[A]ssistive listening devices were available for all three [courtrooms]. In addition, we were advised that trials could or would be switched from one courtroom to another to make trials accessible for witnesses, jurors or other participants.”



**32) Yavapai County Superior Court.** “First Floor: These are the best restrooms for wheelchair users. The doors are light, but closure is fast. The stalls are huge and allow for easy transfer. Sinks are a good height.” Also, “A lower filing window provides excellent access for wheelchairs. The file review desk is acceptable.”



**33) Yuma County Superior Court.** “One employee in a wheelchair needed access to the lower level employee offices. The court found a way to remove part of a stone wall in order to allow access to the entire lower level, which was formerly inaccessible. This was an extremely creative solution, which was further supplemented by portable wheelchair ramps to allow a wheelchair to travel between differing levels in each adjacent office.”



**34) Arizona State Court of Appeals (Division Two - Tucson).** “The library rates an A+ in all areas.”

**35) Arizona State Court of Appeals (Division One - Phoenix).** “All restrooms seemed accessible with no significant issues or concerns noted. The men’ room downstairs included a disposal for needles or other sharp hazardous waste.”



**36) Arizona State Supreme Court.** “For any advocate or member of the public requiring hearing assistance, the court has wireless headphones.”



**37) U.S. Federal Courthouse (Tucson).** “The courtrooms are state of the art and were excellent for persons with disabilities. There is an automatic lift for wheelchairs and people challenged by steps, that provides access to the bench and the witness stand. On the other side of the bench in an area for a witness there is a drawer underneath the floor areas that pulls out and makes a ramp. The jury box also has two chairs on a floor that pulls out, making a ramp for wheelchairs to go into the jury box and in place of the chairs. [...] There are seven wireless hearing assistant devices per courtroom.”





**38) U.S. Federal Courthouse (Phoenix).** “The District Court courtrooms are 2400 square feet. All courtrooms are rigged for hearing assistance. Wireless headphones are used for this purpose. All courtrooms have lifts for witnesses.”



**39) Tonto Apache Tribal Court (Payson).** “The entryway had an automatic double door entrance, with prominent signage and an easily operated push button. As with the entry, there was no problem with the exit, using a crash bar to push it open.” “There is an extensive variety of pamphlets displayed in racks which describe social and disability services within the tribal facility for its members as well as for the greater community. The informational display was prominent and extremely helpful.” “The team visited the room where the Tribal Council meets and which is also used for other tribal functions. It was accessible and possessed sufficiently wide passage and turn areas. The entry doors were accessible, with latch handles, and appear normally open.”





## Technical Suggestions

Properly functioning digital cameras are essential. Non-digital photographs burned to a CD Rom do not present the same clarity as compared to digital images, or permit the same adjustments for contrast and brightness. Additionally, sophisticated surveyors can enlarge and focus in on particular parts of a digital photograph, but cannot with a normal film print. Higher megapixel cameras produce clearer images, with more potential for manipulation during report construction, but also more greatly burden the memory of a computer network. Most of the images in the reports were shot with a four or five megapixel camera. Charge your camera battery completely before starting a survey, as reliance on power outlets inside the facility will hinder the effort. Have plenty of room on your memory stick for images of the courthouse – not less than fifty image spaces should be available for each structure. And try to “clean” as you go – if you need to reshoot an image and have the time to delete the image that doesn’t work, consider doing so immediately.

Try to balance your survey tour duties with an appreciation of the court staff’s time. It is one reason that it is preferable to have not less than two team members, and better yet, three, on each survey. While the photographer looks for photo opportunities and attends to those details, the other team members can ask questions and take responsibility for moving the tour along.

Essential equipment also probably includes a handheld dictaphone for dictating notes, and a tape measure. Even if the survey team is not interested in technical compliance with the Architectural Barriers Act or the Americans with Disabilities Act, counter heights and ramp width nevertheless represent helpful information. Camera photography can actually function as note taking in some instances, but the report should then be compiled as quickly after the survey as possible.

Have a checklist with you, with a copy for court staff as well. The Committee’s checklist is attached in the Appendix, but any effective summary of required survey areas will suffice.

Where possible, take photographs in order of the tour of the building. A photograph of a courtroom, followed immediately by photos of a restroom, normally should inform the report drafter of the location of the restroom. This makes a considerable difference in drafting, when comparing restrooms on public hallways, and those in jury assembly and deliberation areas. With this approach, the drafter can gather like photos into the same report sections, but will be able to describe them more accurately.

Updated computer software is extremely important. The reports were created in Word documents, with images embedded into the document from photos uploaded from digital cameras. The survey compilers frequently shared and passed back and forth, CD Roms of courthouse images. The survey compilers required software that permits the rotation of an image, which typically cannot be done on a CD Rom, but has to be performed at the time the image is embedded in the report.

All reports and digital images should be kept on at least one identified, centralized hard drive, with backup CD Roms burned of the images, if at all possible. Accidents happen, report versions get lost, and photos get deleted – at which point, backup data becomes the primary

document. The greater the scope of the courthouse survey, the more necessary is the backup of all primary electronic information.

Proper vetting of survey participants is also important, with specific standards dependent on the requirements of the entity sponsoring the survey. For this survey, all attorney participants underwent a state bar disciplinary check. Members of the public generally were considered and approved by Committee Chair Sally Simmons, after consultation with State Bar Executive Projects Director Carrie Sherman and Accessibility Subcommittee Chair Jim Reed. Such vetting should take into consideration that, in order for all advocates of the community of persons with disabilities to have voice and influence, basic information must first be obtained and productive dialogue must be initiated with court staff. The Committee feels that the approach chosen ultimately will lead to greater factual empowerment of advocates for persons with disabilities, to use that information as they feel appropriate. At that point, those advocates will likely encounter a more receptive audience for discussion with court staff, as a result of the Committee's supportive and diplomatic approach.

When conversations occurred regarding retrofits of existing buildings, the Committee was careful to consider existing state and county budgets. In doing so, the Committee survey teams did not "price themselves out of the accessibility dialogue." Accessibility regulations not uncommonly present significant latitude in their application, and suggestions sensitive to the time and cost involved in accessible renovations, can avoid unnecessary conflict. Such an approach also can accomplish a result not required under the Architectural Barriers Act or the Americans with Disabilities Act – a retrofit in an historic courthouse.

This effort will take time, energy and resources – share the load. Be very reluctant to turn down offers of assistance, and never do so based solely on technical ability. Associate with a capable information technology professional if possible, even if it means calling the 800 number on your software package, or returning to your local computer store where you bought your equipment to ask questions. Give credit liberally to everyone who assists with the project – they deserve it, and the project will suffer if the technological and logistical side of it fails. This survey report represented the first time many of us on the State Bar Committee used digital cameras or embedded digital photographs into documents. We learned how, because we had to.

Lastly, do not get discouraged. Or better yet, when you do get discouraged, take a break from the effort, but always come back. Don't think perfect – think better. There is no standard for success in an effort like this, nor is progress made all at once, but a little at a time. Each of those small steps is priceless, and the community of persons with disabilities welcomes yours.

We wish you all the best in your own survey effort, in whatever form it may take. If we can be of assistance, we hope that you will not hesitate to contact us. Once again, please visit the webpage for the State Bar of Arizona's Committee on Persons in the Legal Profession with Disabilities, at [www.azbar.org](http://www.azbar.org).

With best regards,

The State Bar of Arizona's Committee on Persons with Disabilities in the Legal Profession.

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