

**State Bar of Arizona Task Force on Persons With Disabilities
Accessibility Committee Site Visit
Maricopa County Courthouse, Mesa Facility
Phoenix, Arizona**

SURVEY BACKGROUND

Facility: Maricopa County Superior Court, Mesa Facility, 222 East Javelina, Mesa, Arizona 85210.

Date: March 19, 2004

Team: James B. Reed (Jaburg & Wilk, P.C.) (team leader); Emily R. Johnston (Arizona State Bar Board of Governors); Christina Larson (Jaburg & Wilk P.C., Phoenix, Arizona); Ilona DeRemer (Administrative Staff - Arizona State University Law School); Sarah White (Student - Arizona State University Law School).

Court Personnel: Court Clerk's Office/Administration Services



Overview

This facility is a regional division of the Maricopa County Superior Court. The team did not observe any significant access-related issues for persons with disabilities. Court administrators and personnel are aware of issues pertaining to access for persons with disabilities, and welcomed our review. The team had one participant with total hearing loss and one participant with mobility impairments. Specific observations follow.

Parking

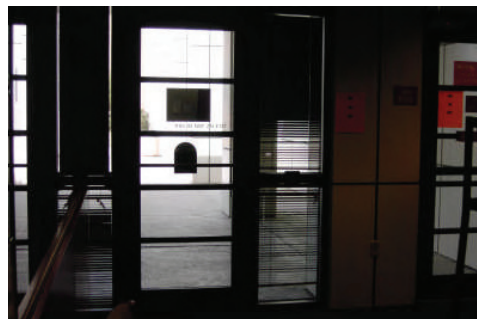
Parking is extensive and sufficient. Accessible parking spaces exist both to the north and south sides of the Courthouse, with proper signage and cut curbs to the entry sidewalk.

Entrances and Exits

Both the north and south entryways are accessible. The facility faces North, with the main entrance and main parking on that side. The entryway has an automatic door opener button that is clearly marked and operated without incident. The security area is relatively wide open, permitting bypass for “wandering” by persons using wheelchairs, walkers or crutches. The entry area is tile, which is helpful for persons using wheelchairs, but presents some risk for persons using crutches or canes.



As with the entry, there was no problem with the exit.



Pamphlet and Informational Services

There are no pamphlets currently available describing services for persons with disabilities. Apparently, the current form of jury summons that is issued includes instructions or information related to persons with disabilities.

Evacuation plans are prominently posted on each floor. The bottom floor stairwell exit was not clearly marked in the hallway, but was sufficient for stairwell occupants in any event, and largely redundant with an exit that a person using a wheelchair would be using, in the main lobby area. Administrative staff assist members of the public, including persons with disabilities during any evacuations.



Restrooms

The team surveyed a representative sampling of restrooms in the courthouse, with any emphasis on the main floor restrooms, and particularly across from the jury assembly room. All restrooms seemed accessible with no significant issues or concerns noted. The restroom doors had accessible latch handles, with some tension resistance that could pose a challenge for persons using a wheelchair. The restrooms had considerable space for turning around in a wheelchair.



The sinks are excellent, but had a 45 degree wooden slope cover over the pipes; while aesthetically pleasing, the wooden barrier makes it difficult to bring a wheelchair fully up against

the sink. The faucet has a push valve at the top of the faucet head, which is quite usable. The length of the sink was over ten feet, leaving considerable room for a person with mobility challenges to operate at the sink.



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 surveyed restroom had a low height urinal, which was accessible for an individual using a wheelchair.



Placement of soap dispensers on the sidewall was optimal, with sidewall placement permitting a person using a wheelchair or of low height to reach to the side for the dispenser without excess soap materials falling on the floor and creating a slippery surfaces. However, height of the soap dispenser was a concern; slightly lower placement would be even more accommodating.



During any remodel, removal of the wooden slope covers, and use of pipe heat wraps instead, would be preferable to a person using a wheelchair.

An upstairs restroom was fully accessible, but with the same 45 degree angle wood cover.

Hallways and Lobbies

All hallways were wide. A hallway information window had a low height counter.



Each floor that the team observed had a water fountain at wheelchair height, and all were functional.



The Clerk's counter did not have any particular accommodations for height, although a shorter "sofa" (half) table was standing underneath one of the counter windows.



Braille signs appeared throughout the building.



The team visited the cafeteria, which seemed slightly confining in parts of the food purchase area, but was passable to a person using a normal sized wheelchair. The dining area was large and fully accessible, with easy entrance and exit space.





The telephones had fully TTY capacity, and were clearly marked in that respect.



Elevators

There is one public elevator shaft on the East side of the main entry area. There was sufficient room in the elevators for entry and mobility. The buttons were placed at appropriate heights. There is a "beep" at each floor as the elevator car arrives and the door opens.



Law Library

The law library is open to members of the general public. The law library is generally accessible.



Court facilities

Courtrooms

Courtrooms are located on several floors. The courtrooms are inconsistent in their accessibility to members of the judiciary and public. 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”, that calls attention to the ramp dimensions. The low ramp, which is very desirable, permits overhang from a wheelchair. The witness stand is large and accommodating; use with a wheelchair would be easily accomplished. Unfortunately, the jury box chairs were bolted to the floor, ameliorating the advantages of the ramp permitting wheelchair access to the box. The impediment of steps or bolted jury box seats seemed consistent throughout the courtrooms. The judicial bench was “naturally” accessible - with same level access into chambers. Counsel’s table would be usable for a person using a wheelchair. In that courtroom, the gallery gate was an average, single door width, and slightly challenging to negotiate with a mobility impairment. The gallery was relatively small in that courtroom, but a person using a wheelchair could observe proceedings.





The second courtroom visited, was larger, but less accommodating within the well area. The witness box was up two steps, as was the witness box. However, the swinging double gate that separates the public gallery from the courtroom well easily permits wheelchair passage, with light tension. The gallery had sufficient room for a person using a wheelchair, and the entry doors were light tension, without handles, and easily pushed open by an individual with a mobility disability. The second set of doors leading out to the courthouse hallway were heavier and more of a challenge, with crash bars to push them open from inside the courtroom.



There are speakers in each row of the jury box. For any juror or witness requiring hearing assistance, the court has wireless headphones. All courtrooms are rigged for hearing assistance.



The lectern could not be raised or lowered to accommodate the height of the speaker. Counsel's table appeared to be at a functionally correct height for use by any attorney using a wheelchair.



Juror Facilities

The jury assembly room opens on the first floor and is entirely accessible. There is easy access for a person using a wheelchair and also for any other device used to assist mobility. There are television monitors inside the jury assembly room, which are used, in part, for informational purposes. It was believed, but not confirmed, that the monitors all had closed caption capacity.



The restroom across the hall from the jury assembly room was fully accessible.

The jury deliberation room that the team visited was fully accessible, with wing handles on the sink, and a table that an individual using a wheelchair could move around relatively easily.



Chambers

The team was afforded access to a representative Chambers. There was ample room for any member of staff or visiting lawyer or member of the public using a wheelchair or other assistive device.

General Observations

All public signs in the building that the team observed were imprinted with Braille code.

Finally, Court Facility staff might benefit from more discussion concerning potential requests for access to a fully electronic courtroom by a party to a criminal or civil suit, where the party's disability may make use of a fully electronic courtroom more beneficial to the presentation of his or her case, but the assigned judge does not ordinarily use one.

CONCLUSION

The Maricopa County Courthouse, Mesa Facility, is an accessible building, both in its main areas of public use and in its courtrooms. Personnel responsible for administering the facility seemed appreciative of the needs of persons with disabilities.

