

**State Bar of Arizona Task Force on Persons with Disabilities
Accessibility Committee Site Visit
Pinal County Superior Court (prior facility)
Florence, Arizona**

SURVEY BACKGROUND

Facility: Pinal County Superior Court, 31 N. Pinal Street, Building E, Florence, AZ 85232
(520) 866-6317

Date: October 10, 2003

Team: Ilona DeRemer, ASU College of Law, Assistant Dean of Career Services; Jacqueline Kochis, ASU College of Law Second Year Student; Dylan Nolle, ASU College of Law Second Year Student; and Jim Reed, Jaburg & Wilk P.C.

County Personnel: Stephanie Jordan, Assistant Court Administrator and Assistant to Court Administrator, Paul O'Connell, enthusiastically and ably facilitated the site visit to Pinal County Superior Court.



General Observations:

Assistant Court Administrator Jordan was extremely helpful during the tour and was informed about ADA standards and accommodations for persons with disabilities. The Court is anxious to see the Task Force's report and encouraged team members to repeat the site visit in the new courthouse. Ms. Jordan expressed her intention to make minimal changes prior to the move to the new building to better accommodate persons with disabilities. The Administration should be commended on their interest in providing complete disability access and the work that they have done under extremely limiting conditions in a very old building.

The Task Force has made plans to revisit Pinal County Superior Court in Spring 2004 to observe the new facilities. The Team is anxiously awaiting this visit.

The team was lead by Jim Reed and Ilona DeRemer. Arizona State University College of Law students Jacqueline Kochis and Dylan Nolle were team members. Dylan has arthrogyrosis, a disabling condition.

Courthouse Structure:

The courthouse is a very old building that has undergone minimal improvements over the years due to space and budget constraints. The new courthouse that is currently under construction will open to the public in January or February of 2004. Assistant Administrator Jordan advised the team that it is anticipated that the new courthouse will meet or exceed federal disability access standards.

Parking:

Ample, identified accessible parking spaces are provided in the front of the courthouse building on Pinal Street.

Entrance/Exit:

The main entrance to the courthouse on Pinal Street is easily accessible by a wide well marked ramp and entry door. The emergency exit in the rear of the building also provides a marked ramp for access; however, the emergency exit does not provide blinking identifying lights for the auditory disabilities or Braille markings for the blind.



Security:

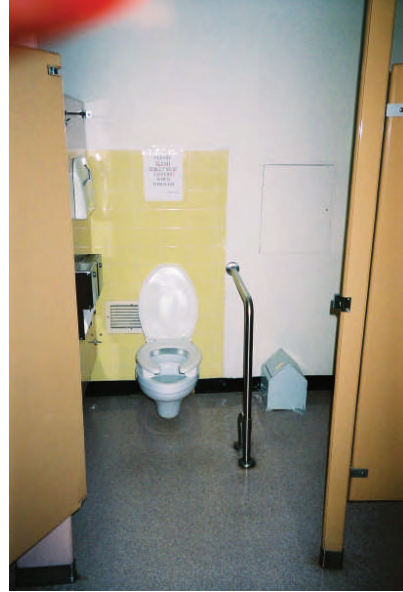
The Court is to be commended for thoroughly training security personnel to sensitively handle the needs of people with disabilities. All visitors are required to pass through security, however, security personnel appear quick to respond to special issues presented by visitors with disabilities by assisting at entry and throughout the building.

Courthouse Interior Structure:

The courthouse is an extremely old building that is aptly on schedule for replacement. General hallways in the building are very wide and easy to navigate, many good benches are provided for seating and resting, and there is an accessible water fountain. Accommodations have been made to the building have improved accessibility. Many room entry doors throughout the building are narrow and present entry difficulties for persons with disabilities. Interior doors close rapidly and have round door handles that are difficult to operate. No Braille identify markings are provided for doors and other facilities in the building and no TDD phones or other accommodations for the hearing impaired are available.

Men's and Women's Restrooms:

The courthouse provides two men's and two women's restrooms. One set of restrooms has been reconfigured and is accessible, however, the paper towel and soap dispenser in the accessible restrooms are mounted too high above the floor for easy access. One sink also has flip knobs making it difficult to turn the water on and off. A recommendation was made to put signage by the inaccessible restrooms directing users to the accessible restrooms.



Jury Assembly and Deliberation Rooms:

The Jury Assembly and Deliberations rooms are accessible but extremely small and would be very crowded and difficult to maneuver in a wheelchair.

Courtrooms:

Courtroom 3:

The courthouse has six courtrooms, one of which is accessible. Division Room 3 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.



All other courtrooms have many steps and other impediments to persons with disabilities including raised jury boxes, judge's benches, clerk's boxes and witness stands. The oldest and largest courtroom presented obstacles to accessibility to be expected in more traditional, historic courtrooms, such as elevated jury boxes and witness stand, without any form of ramp.



Fixed chairs consistently presented obstacles to accessible seating, whether within jury boxes or in the gallery. One of the courtrooms had a gallery passageway with an extremely narrow pass-through. Otherwise, once inside the courtroom "well," there was a great deal of room for mobility with any kind of walking assistance or wheelchair. Consistently, older courtrooms seemed to present very large courtroom wells, which occasionally presented very good opportunities for accessible retrofits, such as ramps into the jury boxes or witness stand.



Chambers:

The team did not visit each of the judge's chambers. We did, however, observe the one chamber that has been made accessible for a judge who was disabled in an automobile accident.

Filing Counters:

All filing counters are too high to be accessible. However, the court staff appears to be trained to accommodate persons with disabilities by moving from behind the counter to serve the client.

Library:

The Law Library appears to be completely inaccessible. The room is so crowded that it would be impossible for a wheelchair to move about and turnaround. There is a spiral staircase in the library leading to a second level. The staircase and second level are inaccessible as well as all publications and computers in the Library. It will be exciting to observe the library accommodations in the new courthouse.

Conclusions:

This structure, which has already been replaced by the New Pinal County Superior Court Facility, presented a reasonable approach to accessible retrofits. In general, courthouse users with disabilities had access to courtrooms and basic services, such as restrooms and main entrances. The New Pinal County Courthouse facility remedied any accessibility issues that the older structure had.