

**State Bar of Arizona Task Force on Persons With Disabilities
Accessibility Committee Site Visit
Mohave County Superior Court
Lake Havasu City, Arizona**

SURVEY BACKGROUND

Facility: Mohave County Superior Court, 2001 College Drive, Lake Havasu City, Arizona 86403

Date: June 4, 2004

Team: James B. Reed (Jaburg & Wilk, P.C.) (team leader); Colleen McManus (State Bar of Arizona); and the Hon. Charlotte Wells (Ret.) (Mohave Community College).

Court Personnel: Janice Gardan, Judicial Assistant; Hon. Randolph Bartlett.



Overview

This facility is a Superior Court for Mohave County in the City of Lake Havasu, Arizona. It was built in 1996, and the team did not observe any significant access-related issues for persons with disabilities. Court administrators and personnel appear aware of issues pertaining to access for persons with disabilities. Specific observations follow.

Parking

Parking is extensive and sufficient. Accessible parking spaces exist on both sides of the courthouse, with proper signage and cut curbs to the entry sidewalk. First-time users might be unaware of the building's parking on the reverse side of the building, away from main road access.

Entrances and Exits

The front entryway is accessible, but slightly awkward in employing two doorways to get to the clerk's counter. There is an additional doorway to pass through before obtaining access to the courts, and then another set of doors to the courts. The entryway to the clerk's area used a latch handle, and presented the greatest mobility challenge of the four doorways that a member of the public must negotiate before entering a courtroom.

The outside entryway was sufficiently wide and had an automatic door opener button that is clearly marked and operated without incident. There was a slight difficulty in navigating the courthouse from the rear entrance.



The entrance and exit doors to the courtroom hallways had crash bars that were relatively easy to negotiate, but were slightly high tension. Assistance would be required for a person passing through the doors using a wheelchair.

Pamphlet and Informational Services

There are no pamphlet currently available describing services for persons with disabilities.

Evacuation plans are prominently posted on each floor and are color-coded for ease of use and reference. Administrative staff act as floor marshals, and are assigned to each floor to assist members of the public, including persons with disabilities during any evacuations.

Court Administration

Filing Counters

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.



Restrooms

The restrooms in the courthouse were fully accessible. The pipes had heat-protection wraps, and the soap and paper towel dispensers were ideally placed for a person using a wheelchair – to the side of the counter, which is closer to the user than a back wall position. This survey has recommended sidewall placement to permit persons using wheelchairs or with low height, to reach the dispensers without excess soap materials falling on the floor and creating a slippery surface. The accessible stalls were very large, permitting an individual using a wheelchair to turn around fully.



The jury deliberation room bathroom was fully accessible, with pipe heat-protection wraps and well-placed soap and towel dispensers.

Hallways and Lobbies

All hallways were wide and accessible. Ramps were available throughout the facility.

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

Easily maneuverable latch handles were observed throughout the building.



Elevators

None.

Law Library

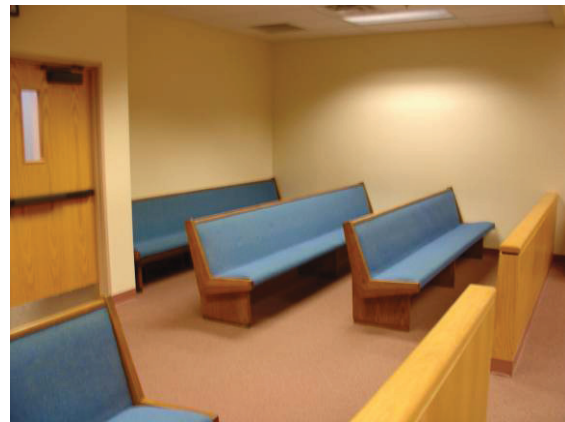
The law library is not open to members of the general public. It is available for use by attorneys admitted to the State Bar and is also used by judges and their staff. The law library is/is not accessible, and includes an automatic door opener.

Courtrooms

Courtroom

The courtrooms are generally very accessible to members of the judiciary and 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 functional. The courtroom doors were light-tension, with hoop handles that are relatively easy to negotiate.



The jury box includes three portable chairs, which may be easily moved to accommodate a juror using a wheelchair. The jury box has a unique configuration, with the first row with a step down to the same level as the well floor. The second row remains at the elevated, ramp-high level. The front-row chairs are all on casters and are removable, thus accommodating individuals with mobility and vision challenges – i.e, the chairs can be moved to permit other jurors to see, whether for vision or height reasons. Unfortunately, the caster chairs are on the level with a step down, and the back row of the jury box is a bench, thus not accommodating a wheelchair.



The lectern was not adjustable in height but could have been used for documents for a person operating to the side of the lectern, to support documents.

The witness stand has a chair on casters, and has a wide area behind the counter to permit a wheelchair to be used.

For any juror or witness requiring hearing assistance, the court has wireless headphones. All courtrooms are rigged for hearing assistance.

Public access to courtrooms appeared to be relatively easy. The handles were large and accessible for persons using wheelchairs. There were no automatic door openers, but the doors seemed to open relatively easily.

Juror Facilities

The jury deliberation room was large and usable for persons with mobility challenges. The one jury deliberation room that the team visited was small. However, it did appear accessible in all material respects.



Chambers

The team was afforded access to a representative chambers. There was ample room for any member of the staff or visiting lawyer or member of the public to maneuver in a wheelchair or move with a walking device.

Signage

Braille signage was throughout the building.

General Observations

Currently, no benches are wheelchair accessible. However, if necessary, Court Administration noted that an accommodation could be made.

If in fact the jury summons does not include an accommodation notice, some thought could be given to including a separate notice with the summons for that purpose.

Similarly, and consistent with any budget demands, some consideration should be given to publishing a pamphlet for members of the public or those in the legal profession with disabilities.

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 Mohave County Courthouse, Lake Havasu City Facility, is an accessible building, both in its main areas of public use and in its courtrooms. Personnel responsible for administering the facility seemed particularly aware of and attuned to needs of individuals with disabilities, and welcomed recommendations and suggestions to improve available services.

