

**State Bar of Arizona Task Force on Persons with Disabilities in the Legal Profession
Accessibility Committee Site Visit
Pima County Superior Court
Tucson, Arizona**

SURVEY BACKGROUND

Facility: Pima County Superior Court, 110 W. Congress, Tucson, AZ, 520-740-4200
(Main number)

Date: November 5, 2003

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County Personnel: Mike Stafford (supervises Facilities & Security) and Chris (Mr.) Hoffman,
Head of Security

General Suggestion: Because it is difficult for first-time visitors to know what accommodations are available in many relevant areas (such as those described in this report), we recommend the Superior Court post a link on its website, providing information including a map with access ramps, etc., clearly marked as well as details about parking, security clearance procedures, availability of listening devices, etc.

Parking:

Parking for attorneys, jurors, visitors and court employees is available at the El Presidio garage (underground on the north side of county complex). There are 6-10 accessible parking spots on all three level, each with elevator access to the surface. The spaces are clearly marked.

Suggestion: For access by someone using a vehicle side ramp or a large van, there should be 8' of clearance on the side. We suggest combining 2 spaces on each level for vans/side ramps B and clearly marking them for this use with cross-hatch striping.

Parking for judges, some court/county employees and visitors by-invitation-only is provided on the "A" level under the courthouse. Of the 14 allotted visitor spaces, 4 are reserved for persons with disabilities.

Entrance/Exit: The courthouse is located on the northwest side of an intersection and can be

accessed from the east (street side) and west (via Presidio Plaza to the north and street to the south). East, ramps are easily accessible and well-marked. On the Plaza, although it meets code, the ramp is both difficult to find (it is unmarked and quite far to the west) and extremely long, with two sharp turns.

Suggestion: A sign could easily be erected near the stairs, pointing towards the ramp.

Security: The Court is to be commended for thoroughly training security personnel to sensitively handle the needs of people with disabilities. In addition to the measures described below, they are quick to respond to special issues as presented. There are no special by-pass privileges and, except for judges and certain court personnel entering via private elevator from the lower level, attorneys and employees must pass through security, just like all other visitors. Following are screening measures utilized in various cases:

Pacemakers: If the person cannot pass through security, an employee will use a magnetic hand wand.

Braces: First, security asks to see a prosthetic ID card. They do not conduct pat downs; instead, clothing is then pulled tight, to provide visual confirmation of braces.

Canes: If the person can walk through security, the cane is then x-rayed, and the person walks through. Otherwise, the person is scanned with a hand wand.

Wheelchair: The person is assisted in passing behind the metal detector. Then security uses a hand wand and mirrors, and (if necessary) lifts blankets, etc., to be certain no prohibited items are being carried. Every effort is made to be unobtrusive in this process.

Emergency Evacuation Procedures: The Court provided a copy of its emergency evacuation procedures. There are four stairwells on each floor, and an Emergency Coordinator on each floor is responsible to coordinate evacuation procedures. During a fire or similar emergency, Court staff are to notify the Coordinator of individuals with disabilities, then move them to a nearby stairwell where, ideally, a court volunteer Abuddy@ will wait with them. The Coordinator then fills out a form for the Fire Department, informing them of the location and situation of individuals with special needs. In the event of a bomb or bomb threat, although the elevators are automatically shut down, Security will use a special elevator key to facilitate immediate removal of individuals with disabilities.

Suggestion: Although fire extinguishers are mounted at an appropriate height, fire alarms are too high to reach by many individuals using wheelchairs.

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 using a wheelchair, including the front counter, tables, computers, water fountains, etc. Listening devices are available for jurors, who receive written notice in advance that accommodations are available should they be needed. The Jury Commissioner's office is located nearby, too, should accessibility needs arise.

First Floor Information Counter: This is the first place visitors seek information about court

calendars, courtroom locations, etc. For individuals with disabilities, there is a low-access counter, staffed with a court employee and copies of the day=s calendar. Although there are no signs indicating this, portable listening devices may be requested at the counter.



Suggestion: Remove the glass partition on top of the counter, which was just installed and has small holes to facilitate communication. However, it is very difficult to hear court employees, without bending over and putting your ear almost directly on the hole. Even if a microphone were installed for court staff, they would still have trouble hearing the person on the other side of the glass.

Men's and Women's Restrooms: (Identical on the 1st- 2nd and 4th - 9th floors)

Although the doorways are wide, the doors are very heavy and there is no way for someone using a wheelchair to exit from the inside. The stall doors are wide enough, but it is difficult to maneuver inside the stalls. The toilet in the accessible stall, which should be 18" from the floor, is low by 4-6". The lights are reachable, and sinks are low enough but, on the only sink with a low soap dispenser, the water faucet handle is difficult to use and requires that a person keep one hand pushed to keep the water flowing. Paper towels are too high to be reached B and the Court indicated a lower dispenser could be added.



Suggestion: Automatic door openers or lighter doors with hinges that reduce the amount of force required for opening to five pounds and that close slowly enough to allow maneuvering, higher toilet in the accessible stalls, water faucet levers that stay on when released and lower paper tower dispensers.

Men's and Women's Restrooms: (3rd floor)

As on other floors, these doors are very heavy and there is almost no way to open them to enter the restrooms. It is also difficult for someone using a wheelchair to exit from the inside. The stalls are wide and well-designed, and one accessible sink is provided, with appropriate counter height, and height of paper towel dispensers. However, the soap dispenser is too high to reach.

Suggestion: Automatic door opener or doors that can be opened with five pounds of pressure and which close slowly, and lower soap dispensers.

Hallways: Hallways are wide, and equipped with benches where court visitors can stop to rest. However, the floors are have low friction for someone who is ambulatory yet has a mobility challenge.

Suggestion: At least on the first floor, consider installing railing down the center of the wide hallway.

Elevators: The speed and force of closure of the doors is appropriate. The doors stay open if someone is in the way and beep if held open too long. Braille is located at an appropriate level, and a bell rings as each floor is passed. The height of controls and the emergency telephone are adequate.

Suggestion: The court directory (indicating names and room numbers) are posted too high.

Library: The Law Library Director gave us a tour, and was interested in potential accessibility accommodations, although there are space and budget restraints. Doorways are heavy and difficult to open. We thought one of the doors was locked, but found, contrary to expectations, it won't open if you turn the handle. The aisles are sufficient and there is turnaround room, but barely enough in both cases. Library staff are willing to help with access to books on higher shelves. The copy machine is too high for someone using a wheelchair to utilize and, although the coin machine was initially in a space too narrow for wheelchair access, Court staff moved furniture to make the space wider. The computer table is 2" too low for wheelchair access, and only the end carrels are appropriate for wheelchair access.

Suggestion: Raise the computer table by one inch or more. Place signs on the end carrels, reserving them for individuals with disabilities (the Director said she would do this right away).

Courtrooms, Jury Deliberation Rooms, etc: Courtrooms on the 2nd, 3rd and 7th floors are unique and specifics are noted below concerning each. On the 4th, 5th and 6th floors, courtrooms are the same, with specifics noted below. The Court indicated that efforts are made to switch courtrooms if needed to accommodate accessibility needs. The judges handle this on a case-by-case basis, although Court Administration or Calendar Services are available to assist if necessary. In the case of a new employee with a disability, the Court indicated that they would do what is necessary to make required accommodations. For example, Judge Davis hired a law

clerk who uses a wheelchair and cut out a portion of the floor, so she could enter/exit the courtroom from the back hallway with the jury for which she was responsible.

Second Floor Hearing Rooms:

Relatively new construction, these rooms get an A+. All three are fully ramped and furniture is moveable, to make accessibility accommodations where needed. Although equipped with automatic openers, the doors close slowly and are not too heavy.



Third Floor Courtrooms:

These are new. The door handles are too high. All courtrooms are compliant with ADA requirements, and one courtroom on this floor has a ramp to the judge=s bench, as well as witness stand. All furniture is moveable and the court plans to put a Atell foot plate@ on the step to the upper jury level, so that jurors know a step is coming up.

Suggestion: Add a second, lower, door handle.

Third Floor Jury Deliberation Rooms:

To make more space in the walkways and at the table (which is appropriate height), the tables are usually moved closer to the back wall. However, law clerks and jurors often rearrange the furniture and it is must periodically be re-situated. The bathroom facilities are very accessible.

Third Floor Conference Rooms:

Appropriate furnished, with sufficient space to move around.

7th Floor Courtrooms:

Courtrooms on this floor are unique. The doors open out, are too heavy and shut too fast. The furniture is bit, heavy and hard to move, and the witness stand cannot be accessed and an individual with a disability must sit out front of the stand to testify.



Suggestion: Lighten the door tension and make them slower-closing. Provide a portable ramp for the witness stand.

7th Floor Jury Deliberation Rooms: (similar to those on 4th, 5th and 6th floors)

The jury rooms are well designed, accessible from the courtroom, with sufficient space to move around, and bathrooms that are big and accommodating.

4th, 5th, 6th Floor Courtrooms:

Doors are somewhat heavy to open and handles are somewhat high. The witness stand cannot be accessed by an individual with a disability, who instead must sit in front of the witness stand in order to testify.

Suggestion: Fix the doors. Provide a portable ramp for courtrooms which do not have them installed.

Chambers:

We did not visit judges' chambers and were told the court would facilitate whatever accommodations were needed for judges, court staff and attorneys visiting in chambers.

Conclusion: Because this is an older building, the court is making improvements as possible. When space is redesigned (as was recently done on the third floor), efforts are made to provide accommodations that meet or exceed federal standards. We learned that in 1994 or 1995, the court received some federal funding designated for use in ADA compliance. The money was used to bring bathrooms in the building up to code. However, in many parts of the building, accommodations have been handled as retrofits, often restricted by space and budget. Court personnel were extremely helpful during the tour and very well-informed about ADA standards and accommodations for persons with disabilities. As indicated in this report, in a few cases, the Court made some changes on the spot, and is very interested in viewing the final Committee report.