



# 2018 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ADVISORY BOARD ON THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT



**2018 Members of  
The Advisory Board on the  
Americans with Disabilities Act**

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**Annual Report to**  
**Chief Justice Richard A. Robinson**  
**from**  
**The Advisory Board on the Americans with Disabilities Act**  
**May 15, 2019**

In 2018, the Connecticut Judicial Branch continued to lead the way in compliance with both the letter and spirit of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), helping to ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to justice. A pillar of compliance is ensuring that Judicial Branch employees are familiar with the law and its requirements.

As an example of leading the way, all Judicial Branch staff, from administrative assistants to staff attorneys in the Supreme and Appellate courts, were notified in May 2018 that they would be required to complete an online overview of the Act, entitled, "*The Nuts and Bolts of the ADA.*" Between May and the end of December, more than 3,800 employees completed this 75-minute training, which was created in-house and which explains the Act, how to request an accommodation, the grievance process, and how to provide assistance to members of the public with disabilities both seen, and unseen.

This report will highlight accomplishments in 2018 across the Branch to ensure equal access, and reveal suggestions for continued compliance in 2019 and beyond. Judge Carroll and the Board extend their appreciation to former members Ms. Doreen Del Bianco of External Affairs, and Attorney Jessie Opinion of the Appellate Court for their service to the Advisory Board through 2018.

**Ongoing Initiatives**

**Training**

Training Judicial Branch employees on how to assist a person with a disability to secure a reasonable accommodation has been and will continue to be a focus of the Branch's efforts at maintaining its compliance with the Act.

Over the last several years, as technology and staffing needs and availability have changed, there has been a shift away from providing only in-person training, to expanding online training offerings. The Branch has offered for several years an Overview of Disability Rights training with permission from the New England ADA Center, one of our partner stakeholders. Over the last two years, the Branch has developed its own online training, based on in-person trainings that, while successful, did not allow for large numbers of staff to be trained. In 2017, the online Service Animals 101 was created by the Centralized ADA Unit, and in 2018, an online version of *The Nuts and Bolts of the ADA* was written and produced by the unit with assistance from the Superior Court Operations Employee Education and Development Unit.

In addition to the mandatory online *Nuts and Bolts* program, Judicial Branch staff completed thousands of hours of additional online training and in-person learning. Beyond the *Nuts and Bolts* online training, staff completed:

- *Online Service Animals 101*
- *Online Overview of Disability Rights*
- Information Technology Division's online ADA Compliance Verification Tools
- Title I Supervisory Training: facilitator- led training was provided in the Human Resource Management Unit, focusing on the interactive process in accommodation and disability issues for Branch employees.
- In-person trainings. This category includes ADA information sessions held across the state, as well as the instructor-led *Popcorn and Possibilities*, *Nuts and Bolts of the Americans with Disabilities Act* with a practicum; *Successful Interactions with People with Hidden Disabilities*; and targeted training for supervisors and other unit-specific groups including Jury administrators and CSSD managers.

Also in 2018, three short "how-to" videos for staff, including on how to complete a Request for Accommodation form for a member of the public, and how to use the audio-enhancing FM Kit and individual pocket-talkers, were developed in-house and published on the Branch's intranet site.

### **Facilities**

The Administrative Services Division oversees the Judicial Branch's facilities, including owned and leased buildings and office spaces such as courthouses, probation offices, and Support Enforcement Services offices. In 2018, the Division worked with the U.S. Department of Justice to conduct a thorough assessment of the New Haven Judicial District's courthouse public, private, and prisoner areas. This extensive review resulted in a list of recommendations from the Department. This included addressing projects both minor, such as rehangng coat racks, brochure racks, and restroom mirrors, to addressing more long-term issues such as ramp slopes and wheelchair seating within courtroom assembly areas. The Branch, through the Facilities unit, presented the DOJ an action plan, including retaining an ADA consultant. The Branch is waiting on the Department of Justice's response.

Also in 2018, the Branch received more than \$1 million to update jury assembly restrooms in six courthouses in Danbury, Fairfield, Hartford, New Haven, New London, and Waterbury. The restrooms will be constructed/retrofitted with accessible and compliant entry widths and wheelchair-turning radius, and outfitted with new fixtures and dispensers installed at accessible heights. This project, which began with an extensive assessment in 2016, is expected to be completed in the summer of 2019.

Facilities has also installed automatic door openers in five locations across Bridgeport, New Haven, and Waterbury, at a cost of \$130,000.

### **Outreach**

The Branch's External Affairs Division maintains a list of available speakers to address community groups and others as part of its Speakers Bureau outreach program. In 2018, the Division added the availability of the Centralized ADA Office to speak to those groups about how to access the Branch's program, processes and facilities for people with disabilities.

The Centralized Office has also conducted outreach, with a presentation at a Legal Exchange program for the public in the Hartford Judicial District, one of the busiest JDs in the state. The office also encourages Chief Clerks

to invite prosecutors and public defenders, whose offices are in Branch-owned courthouses, to attend ADA information sessions, and some have.

In order to respond to a growing number of requests by people with disabilities to bring a non-party, non-attorney to proceedings both public and confidential, the Branch's Legal Services Unit created a three-page brochure, [\*Guidelines for Use of a Support Person in Proceedings\*](#), and published it to the Branch's [ADA homepage](#) on the internet in April 2018.

## **Technology**

In 2018, the Branch launched the use of a database to track ADA accommodations from the public. The database contains the requestor's name, accommodation, date of accommodation, and location of the accommodation. The database was built by Superior Court Operations Division in conjunction with input about operational needs and usability from the Court Support Services division. An ADA database icon was placed on every Branch desktop to allow any staff member the ability to view a person's accommodation, and to allow new accommodation requests to be entered. The database was created in response to a Department of Justice audit that recommended the Branch create a way for the granted accommodation(s) to follow the individual across the Branch, from lower to upper courts. Staff received a notice of the database and its requirements; a two-page guide to using the database; and how-to videos were created to demonstrate the database's use.

On November 1, 2018, the Judicial Branch began offering access to most digital audio recordings of proceedings, to members of the public. Prior to this administrative change, audio had been granted only to people with disabilities. The decision to provide audio access helps to remove a barrier to access to the judicial system.

## **Future Initiatives**

**Training:** In 2019, training initiatives online and in person will continue to ensure the Branch's compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, by providing current information about the requirements under the Act, and supporting the spirit of the Act. Specifically, the Branch will:

- Continue its requirement of completion of the online Nuts and Bolts of the ADA for all new hires. Additionally, Judicial Marshal Services requires all new recruits to complete three ADA-related trainings: *Service Animals 101*, *Hearing Voices*, and on ADA Policy and Procedures.
- Conduct information sessions with Judicial Branch supervisors and staff at locations across the state and encourage attendance by our judicial stakeholders, public defenders and states attorneys and their respective staffs. These sessions, conducted by the Centralized ADA Office staff and offered to every Division, are an opportunity to explain procedures and policies as related to the ADA, and to answer specific questions about accommodation requests, what the Branch can and cannot do, service animals, etc.
- Present information on the ADA to the bar and members of the public at Legal Exchange programs.

- The Centralized ADA office will provide mandatory advanced training to the Branch’s 140+ ADA Contacts.
- Develop new online courses to help ensure that all Branch staff have an opportunity to participate in training about attitudinal awareness when assisting people with disabilities, including those with hidden disabilities such as mental health issues and chronic illness. Specifically, the Centralized ADA Office will create an online version of its facilitator-led “*Popcorn and Possibilities: Dispelling Myths About ‘Disability’*”, which uses video and discussion to examine attitudes, expectations, and hidden biases about what it is to be a person with a visible disability, and “*Hidden Disabilities: If You Can’t See It, Is It There?*” which will feature video and other information about what it is to have a disability that is unseen and yet very real.
- Continue to provide facilitator-led training to the Human Resources departments about Title I of the Act, which protects employees with disabilities. The Administrative Services Division’s Human Resource Management office has developed training and will train HR staff in the Court Support Services and Superior Court Operations divisions, and administrative management at the Information Technology Division. The HRM unit will also offer instructor-led training to Judicial Branch Directors, Deputy Directors, and Regional Manager-level supervisors.
- Train staff of the Probate Court on the requirements of the ADA under Title II.

## Facilities

- Completion of ADA-compliant upgrades to Jury Assembly restrooms in six courthouses, as noted above.
- As part of the Capital Improvement Plan budget, the Branch requested for FY20 and FY21 bond authorizations of \$2 million and \$5 million, respectively. The Administrative Services Division’s Facilities Unit anticipates the funds will be used in these projects:
  - Upon approval of the proposed correction/action plan for the New Haven Judicial District courthouse, the result of the DOJ inspection, an architecture/engineering firm will be engaged to develop a correction plan.
  - Design is underway at the Fairfield Judicial District courthouse to update one Judge’s Chambers to be fully ADA compliant, including ramp access from chambers to the Judge’s bench.
  - Phase II of the Juror Accessibility project will continue and may include upgrades to restrooms in jury assembly areas of the remaining courthouses, and addressing jury box accessibility for wheelchair users.

## Miscellaneous

- Ensure that ADA Contacts are kept up-to-date on Branch policies and procedures that impact its compliance with Title II, via the Centralized office’s electronic newsletter, *ADA E-News You Can Use*.
- Continue to review the Branch’s outward-facing webpages for accessibility and user-friendliness.