

**State Bar of Arizona Task Force on Persons With Disabilities  
Accessibility Committee Site Visit  
Tucson City Court  
Tucson, Arizona**

**SURVEY BACKGROUND**

**Facility:** Tucson City Court, 103 East Alameda, Tucson, Arizona 85701

**Date:** April 22, 2004 (1:30 p.m.- 3:00 p.m.)

**Team:** Grace McIlvain (co-team leader) (Haralson, Miller, Pitt, Feldman & McAnally);  
Laura Todd Johnson (co-team leader) (University of Arizona Attorney's Office); and Emily  
Johnston (Board of Governors, State Bar of Arizona).

**Court Personnel:** Margie Hart, Tucson City Court Executive Assistant, Court  
Administration

## **Overall**

This decades-old facility houses 15 Tucson City courtrooms. The building is an open-air, atrium style complex, where each of the six floors can be viewed from the open square-like center. The building houses its courtrooms on the first, second, and third floors. The Court's central administration department comprises the fourth floor; the City Prosecutors' Office comprises the fifth floor; and the City Public Defenders' Office comprises the sixth floor.

Overall, the team was impressed with the accessibility of this complex, especially given the age of the building. It is clear that the City Court has given careful thought and devoted resources to making many modifications to make the building accessible to persons with disabilities. For example, there are many push button door openers that have been installed throughout the building and significant alterations have been made to enhance the accessibility of restrooms.

## **Parking**

The front of the building has a wide sidewalk area that leads out to a number of parking options for the public, including a pay parking lot and other street-side parking meters in the vicinity. Behind the building is a separate surface level parking lot for employees, with curb cuts in the sidewalks leading to a rear entry of the courthouse through the parking garage. This garage must be entered by pushing open a heavy gate. At the base of the gate is a very steep and short ramp that was apparently added in an attempt to make the entry accessible. Unfortunately, for a person using a wheelchair, this parking garage entrance is inaccessible because the person using a wheelchair cannot reach the gate door, let alone push the door open, while on the ramp's steep incline. There are several accessible parking spaces available in the parking garage, currently utilized by employees, though court personnel notified the team members that there are limitations on who can utilize the parking garage due to structural damage to the garage.

Suggestion: The parking garage accessibility and parking situation should be assessed, budget permitting. If possible, the rear entry barrier should be remedied and made accessible with a new ramp and reconfiguration of the gated entry.

## **Entrances and Exits**

The front entryway is accessible and has two security metal detector archways available once inside the doors, and a number of security guards. The door is attended at all times. We were advised that the guards utilize the security wand-style metal detector for any individuals who are unable to pass through the archways.

The entry from the rear of the building through the parking garage has an automatic door opener button that is clearly marked and works well.

## **Security/Emergency Evacuation**

At each floor of this complex, there is an area that is easily visible from each floor (due to the atrium style of the building) with large yellow triangles painted on the walls. These triangle

signs signify that this is the location where individuals who need physical assistance should go in the event of an emergency. Court personnel advised the team that fire department officials as well as court employees are aware of this signage and its significance. There are designated employees on each floor whose duty it is in an emergency to notify everyone on the floor who needs assistance to go to the area where the yellow triangles are.

### **Informational Services**

There is no pamphlet currently available that describes services for persons with disabilities. Tucson City Court receives its jurors from Superior Court, and court personnel believe that the current Superior Court form of jury summons that is issued includes information for persons with disabilities concerning how to request accommodations.

Suggestion: If its budget would allow, the Court could consider preparing a card or pamphlet (similar to that issued by the Phoenix Municipal Court) describing accommodation services for members of the public or those in the legal profession with disabilities.

### **Court Administration**

There are two areas in the complex where the court case calendars or dockets are posted for the public and counsel. One is in a nook on the first floor and the other is on the third floor between courtrooms. Both areas have the docket sheets posted in rows, with the top rows positioned approximately 5 feet from the ground. It would be impossible for a person using a wheelchair to check the time, judge, and courtroom of any given court case on the top row docket sheets. This challenge could easily be remedied, however, if the boards holding the docket sheets could be positioned lower on the walls for full access by everyone.

Suggestion: The docket calendars should be lowered to an accessible height.

### **First Floor Offices**

There are several offices of note on the first floor, including a public services office that impressed the team. This large office has automatic door openers and numerous public cubicle counters positioned at a fully accessible height.

There is also a warrants office on the first floor. The team noted that it would be difficult for an individual using a wheelchair to enter the adjoining court area through this office and that the interior door appears to open on the wrong side.

There is also a domestic violence office on the first floor. This office has window counters that the team considered to be a bit high; but the team also noted that the substantial number of glass windows along the counters created good visibility.

## **Fourth Floor Offices**

The team viewed various offices and areas on the fourth floor including records and case management, probation, calendaring, and judicial services. The team was impressed with the spaciousness and accessibility of these areas.

## **Restrooms**

The restrooms for men and women on the first floor of the complex are both equipped with automatic door openers and each has Braille on its outside sign. The restrooms on the first floor are fully accessible, with the towel dispenser at a good height and a slanted mirror as well. The team did notice, however, that the sink handles could be updated for more accessibility.

There are bathrooms on the second floor, but they are narrow and not wheelchair accessible. Both the men's and women's restroom on the second floor have signs that direct individuals to the first floor for wheelchair accessible restrooms.

On the third floor, there is a public restroom that is fully accessible. The entry door has good tension, the rails are positioned well, the towel dispensers are positioned at an accessible height, and there is an accessible cut-away sink. The sink knobs could be updated for better accessibility.

On the third floor, along the hallway that is accessible by court personnel for the judges' chambers, there is another restroom. This restroom appears to be structurally wheelchair accessible; unfortunately, the team found a stack of metal lockers for employees' belongings in the room that impaired wheelchair accessibility into the restroom. These lockers would need to be relocated for this restroom to be fully accessible.

Suggestion: The restrooms should be assessed to make certain that the towel and soap dispensers are lowered sufficiently to provide full access; rails should be added where there are none; and, if possible, the sink handles should be updated where necessary. In addition, thought should be given to relocating the metal lockers that impair access to one of the restrooms.

## **Hallways**

### **Public Telephones**

The public telephones are at a fully accessible height.

### **Water Fountains**

All water fountains that the team saw included a fountain at wheelchair height, and all were functional.

## **Elevators**

There are two elevators in the complex, both fully accessible, and complete with Braille inside and outside.

## **Courtrooms**

### **First Floor**

On the first floor, there are three specialized courtrooms. Courtroom 1 is a video arraignment courtroom and, though the team was not able to view this courtroom from within, it appears to be fully accessible. There is an automatic door opener outside of the courtroom.

Courtroom 2 is a large arraignment courtroom, and the team was able to view it from within. It has wide aisles, is fully accessible, and also has a working automatic door opener outside of the courtroom.

Courtroom 3 is a sentence enforcement courtroom, made up primarily of a waiting area with chairs, benches, and a counter window. This courtroom was not as accessible as the first two courtrooms. The door was particularly heavy to open, and the plastic or metal chairs were arranged in such a fashion that would block a person using a wheelchair from easily entering the room. Wooden benches along the side of the room are positioned in such a way that they would block a person using a wheelchair from access to the counter window. The counter at the window is at a height that would make it difficult for an individual using a wheelchair to comfortably utilize.

### **Second and Third Floor**

There are six courtrooms, numbered 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9, on the second floor. On the third floor, there are six additional courtrooms, numbered 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15. Though the team was not able to enter most of the courtrooms due to the timing of our visit, we were able to view each of them through the glass windows surrounding the entry areas. Two of these 12 courtrooms (numbers 5 and 11) have ramps for a person in a wheelchair to access the jury box, the witness stand, or the court clerk desk. The remaining ten courtrooms have steps up to these areas and do not have wheelchair accessibility for witnesses or jurors. All of the courtrooms do, however, appear to have plenty of space for a person in a wheelchair in the sitting areas behind counsel tables. It appeared to the team that counsel tables in the courtrooms could accommodate a person using a wheelchair, and that the gates themselves are wide enough for a person in a wheelchair to freely move from one area to another.

Due to the timing of our visit, the team was unable to ascertain whether the courtrooms were fully electronic, or equipped with sensitive microphones, cordless earphones, or assistive listening devices.

Suggestion: Budget permitting, thought should be given to increasing the number of courtrooms with ramps to the jury or witness boxes. Modifying an additional two courtrooms

would significantly increase the likelihood that a defendant, witness, or juror who uses a wheelchair will not have to wait unnecessarily for his or her trial to be reassigned to one of the two accessible courtrooms. Similarly, thought should be given to increasing the number of courtrooms that are wheelchair accessible from the judges' chambers to the courtroom.

## **Juror Facilities**

### **Jury Assembly Rooms**

One of the jury assembly rooms is on the second floor. While the team found this room to be generally accessible, we noted that the door to the room is very heavy and no automatic door opener is in place. The team also noted that the telephone placement is too high for a person using a wheelchair to utilize. The restroom contained within this jury assembly room has no rails on the walls and the soap and towel dispensers are too high for individuals using a wheelchair to utilize.

The other jury assembly room is on the third floor. As with the first jury assembly room, the door to this room has a heavy door with no automatic opener. Again, the telephone placement is too high. The team noted with appreciation, however, that there are rails in the adjoining restroom, and an accessible sink.

Suggestion: It would be helpful, though, if the paper towel dispenser were lowered in this restroom. The height of the wall telephones in jury rooms should be also checked for accessibility.

### **Jury Deliberations Rooms**

The team viewed two jury deliberations rooms on the second floor. Both rooms are fully accessible with tables that can accommodate wheelchairs, and have white boards and telephones placed at an accessible height.

## **Judges' Chambers**

The judges' chambers behind the courtrooms are accessible through a doorway that is equipped with an automatic door opener and push spots on the doors themselves. The judges' offices can be accessed by a person using a wheelchair without barrier. The team did note, however, that access for judges from chambers to the third floor courtrooms requires two stair steps for every courtroom except courtroom 11 which has a ramp from the chambers hallway down to the judge's entry door to the courtroom.

## **Other Facilities**

There are lounges for employees on the third and fourth floors that are spacious and accessible.

## **GENERAL OBSERVATION**

The Tucson City Court is a fast-paced courthouse serving a large number of people each day. Though there are several issues which we hope can be addressed to improve access throughout (such as checking the tension on all doors), the team was very impressed overall with the thought and attention which the Court has already given to making alterations in the facility which have greatly increased accessibility for persons with disabilities.