

**State Bar of Arizona Task Force on Persons with Disabilities  
Accessibility Committee Site Visit  
Federal District Court Of Arizona  
Tucson, Arizona**

**SURVEY BACKGROUND**

**Facility:** Federal District Courthouse, 405 W. Congress Street, Tucson, AZ 85701

**Date:** November 14, 2003

**Team:** Paula Nailon (team leader, University of Arizona College of Law); Emily Johnston (Board of Governors, State Bar of Arizona); Joe Parkhurst (Attorney General's Office); Dee-Dee Samet, Esq.

**Court Personnel:** Ned Lareau in charge of Facilities and Mike O'Brien, Clerk of the Southern District Federal Court.



## **Overview**

This Court House was recently built and has excellent facilities for persons with disabilities. The Court personnel were extremely helpful during the tour and very well-informed about ADA standards and accommodations for persons with disabilities. There is great interest in viewing the Accessibility Committee's report.

## **Parking**

Parking for attorneys, jurors, visitors is available at public parking near the Court. If jurors notify the Court they have a disability there is an accessible parking place for Court employees that can be made available for the juror. There is no such accommodation for attorneys. A person with a disability who parks in the employee lot must go around the building to access the entrance and a ramp. There were four accessible parking spaces in the public lot behind the Courthouse. It might be helpful to request the owner of the lot to increase the number of parking spaces given the number of people that use the Courthouse and the size of the lot.



## **Entrances and Exits**

The courthouse is located on the southwest side of an intersection and can be accessed from the public parking lot on the southwest side of the building, or from the north side of the building across the street at the state parking lot. There is also parking on the east side of the building across the street at the convention center parking lot. On the south side, ramps are easily accessible and well-marked. On the north side a ramp is also available and a member of our team who used a wheelchair said it was easy to access.

## **Security/Emergency Evacuation**

Security personnel have people enter through the regular security entrance and a person using a wheelchair can fit through the area. Security then use a hand wizard to further examine the person. They also ask the person to stand if able to examine the back of the person. There are no special by-pass privileges except for judges and court personnel entering via an entrance next to the public security entrance. All attorneys, jurors and the public must pass through security.



There are four stairwells on each floor, and each Court Assistant has the responsibility to notify emergency personnel if there is a person with a disability on the floor. During a fire or similar emergency, Court staff are to notify the Coordinator of anyone with a disability. The person with a disability, if they cannot use the stairs, are to go to a nearby stairwell where they wait for someone to help them evacuate. In addition the Court has people that walk each stairwell to make sure they are clear in an evacuation and no one is left in the building. It was noted that there were fire alarms in the halls and they were at a level that someone using a wheelchair could easily reach.

### **Court Administration**

This is the first place visitors seek information about court calendars, courtroom locations, etc. For a person with a disability, there is a low-access counter, staffed with court employees. There are low counters in the records room and everything was wheelchair accessible. Door handles were long so they were easily accessible; however, the door was heavy and would be difficult for some one without upper body strength. The door is in an area near security and it is anticipated that help would be available to open the door.

### **Restrooms** (Similar on all floors)

Although the doorways are wide, the handle on the door was too high and needs a second handle lower so it is reachable by someone using a wheelchair. Bathrooms are state of the art with great accessibility. The stall doors are wide and there is room to maneuver inside the stalls. Sinks are low enough and the soap is easily reached. The water faucets are automatic.



Suggestion: Lower the door handle or add a second lower handle.

### **Law Library and Jury Assembly Room**

The bathrooms were accessible but there is not enough room beside the toilet for a side transfer from a wheel chair. The towel dispenser was also too high and needed to be moved to a lower area.

Suggestion: Switch the sink to a different wall so there is room beside the sink for a side transfer. In the library one could go out to the public bathroom although it would not be as convenient. For a juror it would be more difficult and the person may have to be accompanied by court personnel if the jury is deliberating.

### **Hallways**

Hallways are wide, and equipped with benches where people can stop to rest. Water fountains are wheelchair accessible. Fire alarms and extinguishers are low enough to access from a wheelchair, and the public phone on the first floor has TTY capabilities.

### **Elevators**

The speed and force of closure of the doors is appropriate. The doors stay open if someone is in the way. The height of controls are adequate. However the Braille buttons are too high if someone was in a wheelchair. Emergency telephones are high but these elevators have cameras which are being observed by security if a problem arises. The emergency buttons were low enough to be pushed. There were rugs in front of the elevator that got wrinkled by a person using a wheelchair.

Suggestion: Fix the rugs so they are not moved by a wheelchair going across them. Have Braille information lower also. There is a question that if some one is standing the height may be correct. Also the height for Braille signs may be mandated.



## **Library**

The Librarian, Deo Maynard, gave us a tour, and was very interested in potential accommodations. The library had wide door entrances with long handles that were able to be opened by people using a wheelchair, but the doors may be difficult for a person on crutches to open. The library is a beautiful facility with wide aisles and many book shelves low enough to be wheelchair accessible. The tables and counters are low, but there is a lip on the table, while may make it difficult for folks with wheelchairs of a certain height to sit there. There was one counter that was used by library personnel that was higher so that people working would not have to bend and have back problems. The Law Librarian thought that accommodations could be made by putting a desk or counter at a lower place if there was an employee with a disability.



The only problem were the bathrooms inside the library, although marked as accessible, were not. Specifics are addressed above.

## **Courtrooms**

Courtroom doors were wide but the handles were too high. Lower handles could be installed to be wheelchair accessible. The inner door to the Courtroom was heavy and if someone in a wheelchair did not have upper body strength then it would be difficult to open. However, it had a glass panel which would be helpful if some one was trying to get in and couldn't as they could be observed from the Courtroom and receive help. The Courtrooms are the state of the art and were excellent for those that are disabled. There is an automatic lift for wheelchairs and people with step challenges that accesses the bench and the witness stand. On the other side of the bench in an area for a witness there is a drawer underneath the floor area that pulls out and makes a ramp. The jury box also has two chairs on a floor that pulls out making a ramp for wheelchairs to go into the jury box and in place of the chairs. There are portable lecterns on rollers that adjust up and down in height for the lawyers. Computer screens at the attorney desks can be moved and are accessible. The desks are the right height and are wheelchair accessible. There are 7 wireless hearing assistant devices per courtroom. There was no sign in the courtroom advising of their availability.







Suggestion: Post sign advising of availability of hearing assistant devices or assure that jurors, witnesses and other participants are notified in some other way.

### **Juror Facilities**

The room was well planned and accessible for people using a wheelchair. It was suggested that the letter sent to prospective jurors include a statement that if the prospective juror has a disability they should advise the jury administrator and accommodations can be made. This addition to the usual letter is something that may be accomplished easily and Court personnel were amenable to this addition to the jury letter. There were signs of the availability

of listening devices and there were listening devices on hand. All services are located low enough to be reached by someone in a wheelchair, including tables, water fountains, etc. The Jury Commissioner's office is located nearby and has a window into the jury assembly room should unique circumstances arise.

There is room for wheelchairs and the table is the correct height. The only problem is the jury bathrooms which is set forth above.

### **Chambers**

In order to access the Court Chambers a button must be pressed and there is a speaker. The button was too high to be reached from a wheelchair, but each judge has an assistant with a T.V. that shows the outside area where the person wanting access is located. The person waiting could be seen on the T.V. The Chambers were very disability accessible. However, the bathrooms in the Judge's chambers also had no room to side transfer from a wheelchair. This would be remedied if there was a judge that is disabled. Transferring the sink to another wall would accomplish this.

Suggestion: Lower buttons on speaker outside of Court Chambers.

### **General Observations**

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 each 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.