

**State Bar of Arizona Committee on Persons With Disabilities
Accessibility Committee Site Visit
Maryvale Justice Court
Phoenix, Arizona**

SURVEY BACKGROUND

Facility: Maryvale Justice Court, 4622 W. Indian School Road, Suite D10, Phoenix, Arizona 85031

Date: Friday, March 26, 2004

Team: Carrie Sherman (State Bar of Arizona) (team leader); Emily Johnston (Board of Governors, State Bar of Arizona); Jim Reed (Jaburg & Wilk, PC); and Ed Myers (Attorney at Law).

Court Personnel: Laura Walker (Court Manager); Janice Waggoner (Judicial Administrator); Milli Lee (Loss Prevention Consultant, Maricopa County Occupation, Safety and Health Division). Presiding Judge: The Hon. Andrew Gastelum.



Overview

This one-story building, located in an industrial-type “strip mall”, has been leased by the Maricopa County court system since 1991. It contains one courtroom and one Community Conference Room. Traffic through the facility ranges from 90 to 160 individuals per day.

The court staff welcomed the team inside the front entrance and were extremely helpful throughout the duration of the tour. They were knowledgeable about accessibility issues, were open to suggestions and were eager to correct problems that were identified.

Parking

There are approximately 30 parking spaces within a short distance from the entrance of the courthouse, with designated accessible spaces located on either side of the front door. The sidewalk at the main entrance gradually sloped into the parking lot, thus accommodating those using mobility assistive devices.

Entrances and Exits

The front door was heavy and difficult to open. The door’s tension appeared to be more than the standard five pounds. The security guard, stationed inside the front entrance to the right, could open the door for a visitor(s) if the guard were to look up and notice that a person required assistance to enter the building.

Suggestion: A simple readjustment to the tension on the front door would make it easier to open and more accessible.



Security

In the case of an emergency, the security guard and the court manager are trained to facilitate evacuation procedures. They are responsible for conducting a sweep of the facility and for assisting persons with disabilities in exiting the building.

Court Administration

Filing Counters

The primary counter to serve customers is 40 inches high. The cut-out portion of the counter which is lower and designed for use by persons using wheelchairs/scooters is covered with various materials and a computer.

Suggestion: If budgetary considerations are favorable, the team recommends that the counter be lowered to 35 inches for enhanced access. Although the team recognizes the staff's challenges with regard to filing, storage and space needs, it recommends that the materials and the computer be removed from the lower counter in order to accommodate individuals using wheelchairs/scooters.



Restrooms

The men's and women's restrooms are accessible. Each features paddle latch handles on the doors and one-lever sink faucets. The toilet paper, soap dispensers, and air hand dryers are at low levels. The pipes under the sinks are covered.

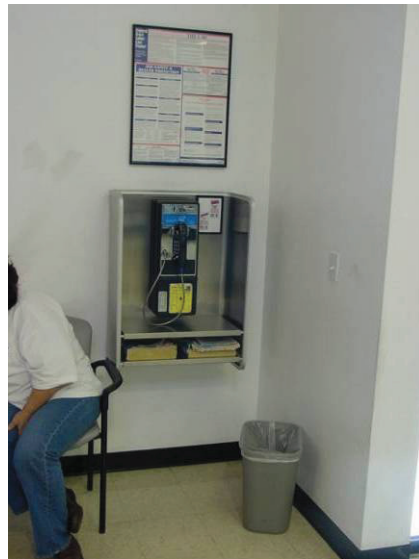


Hallways

The lobby in front of the service counters is a large open area with ample seating and room for persons using wheelchairs. The hallway to the courtroom, conference room and restrooms is wide and spacious.

Water Fountains and Telephones

The drinking fountain and public telephone are at a low level and are functional.



Elevators

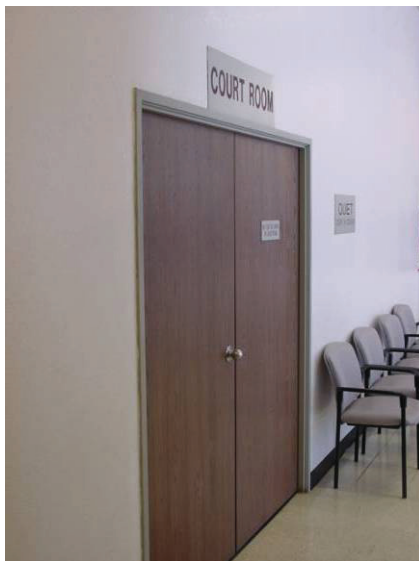
There are no elevators in this building.

Library

This facility does not have a fully equipped law library per se. There are some law books and legal publications in the Community Conference Center (see Juror Facilities).

Courtroom

The last jury trial held in the courtroom was approximately one and half years ago. The one courtroom door has round doorknobs (as opposed to the latch handles on the restroom doors). There is plenty of room for wheelchair access in the gallery. The swinging/bar doors which divide the gallery from the courtroom well are kept in the open position. There is a step up to the jury box. Chairs in the jury box are on casters and easily movable. The bench is unusually high making it difficult, as the team later learned from the judge, to pass documents between the judge and the plaintiff and defense attorneys.



The outstanding feature in this courtroom, and the first encountered since the commencement of the site visits, is the witness stand. There is no step up to the stand; it is on the same level as the rest of the courtroom making it totally accessible. There is 33 inches between the jury box and the witness stand thus allowing easy access for those using mobility assistive devices.



Suggestion: Paddle latch door handles are recommended to replace the round doorknobs on the courtroom door. Although a juror using a wheelchair/scooter can be positioned next to the jury box, a ramp up to the jury box would make this portion of the courtroom accessible and inclusive for all jurors. However, the team recognizes that the chance of convening a jury trial in this courtroom in the future is remote (see General Observations).

Juror Facilities

There is a large room across the hallway from the courtroom. The Community Conference Room can be utilized as a second courtroom, a jury room or a meeting room. (As previously noted, the last jury trial held at this facility was over a year and a half ago.) This room can be rearranged to accommodate the purpose for which it is to be used. It is fully accessible.



Judge's Chambers

The Honorable Andrew Gastelum graciously welcomed the site visit team into his chambers which are accessible. The route to his chambers went through the court personnel's workspace which contained filing cabinets and office equipment. Court personnel are vigilant in

keeping the pathway clear of excess paperwork, boxes, etc., which is a constant challenge due to the size of the work area.

There are steep stairs leading from the judge's chambers up to the bench. A judge with a physical disability would not be able to access the bench without major renovations being made to this area.



Suggestion: A clear pathway to the judge's chambers would be ideal. There currently, however, are no employees who have a physical disability who would be hindered in their navigation of this area.

Signage

There were no signs in the common public area to indicate the location of the accessible restrooms.

Suggestion: The team recommends the addition of signs that provide directions to the accessible restrooms. In addition, signage in Braille throughout the facility would further enhance its accessibility. Such signage is relatively inexpensive.

CONCLUSION

The Maryvale Justice Court is an accessible facility and has served the local community well over the past 13 years. It should be noted that the Maricopa County courthouse system is being restructured, with some courts being combined and new facilities being built. This court will be moved and incorporated into another structure in about a year and a half. Some minor modifications, noted herein which can be accomplished at an estimated low cost, could provide greater and easier access at this location until it is closed and relocated.

It bears repeating that the witness stand in the courtroom, totally accessible as it rests on the same level as the courthouse floor, is an extraordinary feature. This idea can easily be replicated in courtrooms everywhere although, recognizing that such a feature departs from the standard design of a “typical” courtroom, may be slow in gaining acceptance.

The accessibility team commends the court staff on their knowledge of accessibility issues and their openness in receiving recommendations and suggestions to improve available services. The team is grateful for their time and hospitality.

