

**State Bar of Arizona Task Force on Persons With Disabilities
Accessibility Committee Site Visit
Glendale and North Valley Justice Courts
Maricopa County Superior Court (Regional Court Center)
Glendale, Arizona**

SURVEY BACKGROUND

Facility: Glendale and North Valley Justice Courts, and Maricopa County Superior Court (Regional Court Center), 5222 W. Glendale Avenue, Glendale, Arizona 85301

Date: March 23, 2004

Team: Bill Sheldon, Esq. (team leader), State Compensation Fund; Valli G. Fisher, Esq., The Fischer Law Firm; Carrie Sherman, State Bar of Arizona; Gregory S. Fisher, Esq., Jaburg & Wilk, P.C.

Auxiliary Team members: Donnette Thomas, Disability Advocate

Court Personnel: Annette Sanchez-Campbell, Chief Clerk Glendale Justice Court

Overview

While presenting an accessible courthouse experience in many respects, this facility would benefit from some attention in the area of accessibility. It is unknown when this building was constructed, but it was renovated approximately four years ago. However, some of the disability access issues were not addressed during that renovation. Apart from structural challenges, some of the court personnel would probably welcome more specific training in terms of disability access issues. The court administrator who accompanied the team on its survey, Ms. Sanchez-Campbell, is extremely supportive of improving access for persons with disabilities. Most of the problems or issues that were noted are correctable at little or even no cost. Therefore, although this facility requires some attention, the method, means, and motive exist to effect quick, effective, and cost-efficient solutions. Specific observations are briefly discussed below.

Entrances and Exits

There is no automatic door opener for a person using a wheelchair at the entry-way. A sign is posted advising people entering the building that absolutely no pets of any kind are allowed. Although the team assumed that anyone with a service animal would not be denied access, it is suggested that the sign be changed so that persons with assistance animals are not discouraged from entering. Parking is sufficient. There are six accessible parking spots available near the front entrance. Anyone entering using a wheelchair must enter through the door ordinarily reserved for exits. This is not a major problem, but there is no sign outside explaining this to members of the public.

Suggestions: (1) Signs or directions should be posted outside so that anyone approaching the courthouse would know how to gain access to the courthouse (that is, which door to use) if they are using a wheelchair. (2) The sign indicating that "no pets of any sort are allowed" should be removed and replaced with a sign clarifying those persons with service animals (e.g., seeing eye dogs) are welcome to enter. (3) Budget-permitting (and the team understands that it may not be), some thought should be given to adding an automatic door opener to the entrance.

Court Administration

There are four service counters located in the main lobby. One is for the Glendale Justice Court, one is for the North Valley Justice Court, one is for the Superior Court, and one is a file-room counter which doubles as a disability-access counter. The three main service counters were all too high—approximately 42" high. We were advised that, if a member of the public using a wheelchair needed help, help would be provided at the file-room counter.

Suggestion: Access to the service counters could be improved by including a bell and sign.

Restrooms

Restrooms are near the entrance, which is very convenient, but access is a challenge. The hallway is small and several loose odds and ends are currently being stored in the hallway. These items included chairs, a desk, and a file cabinet. The net effect was that, at certain points,

the hallway's width was narrowed to 28"—too narrow for wheelchair access. Ms. Thomas passed her wheelchair through the space, but with some difficulty.

There was no sign indicating where the restrooms were located, but the building is not that large and presumably anyone could find the restrooms or ask someone for help. The restrooms inside were generally accessible. One issue that was noted was that the pipes under the sink probably should have their insulation checked. The water faucets are standard water conservation faucets which may pose some problems for certain members of the public with disabilities. But the team understood that competing interests (water conservation, damage from water faucets being left on) were at issue.

Suggestion: The desk, chairs, and other miscellaneous items being stored in the restroom hallway should probably be moved to another location to improve access to the restrooms, water fountain, and telephone.

Hallways

Public Telephone

There is a public telephone at the far end of the hallway near the restrooms. It was at an appropriate, accessible height.

Water fountains

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

Elevators

There are no elevators in this building.

Courtrooms

Glendale Justice Court Courtroom (Courtroom 1)

The courtroom for the Glendale Justice Court is Courtroom 1. This courtroom has a spot in the public gallery for a wheelchair. There is wide access and no problem with the gate separating the public gallery from the court well where counsels' tables are placed. Problems noted are that both the witness box and the jury box are too narrow (28") for most wheelchairs. Ms. Thomas was barely able to squeeze into these spaces with her wheelchair.

Superior Court (Regional Court Center) (Courtroom 2)

The team was not able to access this courtroom because a proceeding was underway when we were present.

North Valley Justice Court Courtroom (Courtroom 3)

The courtroom for the North Valley Justice Court is Courtroom 3. This courtroom also has a spot in the gallery for a wheelchair. The courtroom is essentially similar in most respects to Courtroom 1. However, there were a few minor differences. Access to the witness box was fine. But access to the jury box was difficult because the space was too narrow (28"). The proximity of the Counsels' tables to the gates separating the public gallery from the court well pose a challenge for wheelchair access. As a result, Ms. Thomas experienced some difficulty navigating her wheelchair through this area. One last problem noted was that the door was quite heavy and closed fast. It would be difficult for someone with mobility challenges to enter, and the door might close too fast on anyone with a mobility problem.

Suggestion: The witness and juror boxes could be modified (enlarged) if possible. It appeared that this could be easily done by cutting away a foot or so from the ends of the rails bordering these sections. If possible, tension on the door might be changed so that it does not close too fast.

Juror Facilities

There is no separate jury assembly room. When called, jurors assemble in each respective courtroom.

We visited one jury deliberation room which was located between Courtrooms 1 and 2 and apparently shared by both courtrooms. This room appeared accessible and functional for all purposes.

Other Facilities

The team was permitted access to the Superior Court work area where we talked with Sherry Aguirre who uses in a wheelchair. Ms. Aguirre escorted the team through the employees' area behind the court offices. The team saw that several loose chairs and other items were stored in a break room used by employees who precluded access to the break room kitchen counter by a person using a wheelchair. Ms. Aguirre confirmed that she could not access the kitchen counter. The exit door in the break room could be modified so that a persons using a wheelchair or who has a mobility challenge could use it. There is a button that one must push to disengage the exit door in the break room. The button is approximately 50" high—too high for most people using a wheelchair. In this same general area the team saw a ladder blocking part of the doorway to another exit. Suggestion: Court personnel easily can assure pathways are kept accessible.

General Observations

Ms. Sanchez-Campbell advised that a sign language interpreter was available if needed. She further advised that they had not had a problem getting a sign language interpreter on short notice if and when needed.

Apparently, there are no listening-assistance devices for members of the public who have a hearing limitation.

The juror summons could include an accommodation notice. This could be patterned after the ADA Notification notice that Arizona Rule of Civil Procedure 45(g) currently requires be placed on all subpoenas. "Persons requiring assistance or accommodation for any disability should contact [name and number]." This is slightly paraphrased from Rule 45(g) ("Requests for reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities must be made to the court by parties at least 3 working days in advance of a scheduled court proceeding").

The tension on all doors could be checked to make them more accessible.

Budget-dependent, some consideration should be given to publishing a pamphlet for members of the public or those in the legal profession with disabilities.

Court administrators could institute some training to advise all court personnel concerning disability access issues. Court administrators could also consider inspecting the premises on some sort of periodic basis to ensure that items are not being stored in such a way as to impede access to areas of the courtroom.

The Glendale Justice Court is a busy courthouse serving a large number of people each day. The court has a limited budget. There are a number of issues that need to be addressed to improve access. Fortunately, however, most of the issues present "easy-fixes." Court personnel were interested in doing what they could to address those challenges and to help improve access.