

**State Bar of Arizona Task Force on Persons With Disabilities
Accessibility Committee Site Visit
Navajo County Superior and Justice Courts
Holbrook, Arizona**

SURVEY BACKGROUND

Facility: Navajo County Superior Court and Justice Court Facility, 100 East Carter Drive, South Highway 77, Holbrook, Arizona 86025

Date: April 27, 2004

Team: James B. Reed (Jaburg & Wilk, P.C.) (team leader); Emily Johnston (Board of Governors, State Bar of Arizona); and Carrie Sherman (State Bar of Arizona).

Court Personnel: Bobbie Ortega, Court Clerk's Office/Administration/Services.



Overview

This facility is the County and Justice Courthouse Facility in Holbrook. Built in 1977, the courthouse has two trials per month, with grand jury assemblies four times a year. The visiting team had persons with mobility and hearing disabilities. It is a relatively new structure, and was remarkable in its accommodations for persons with disabilities. The team did not observe any significant access-related issues for disabled persons. Court administrators and personnel are aware of issues pertaining to access for disabled persons. A courtroom under construction seemed designed for full accommodation. Specific observations follow.

Parking

Parking is extensive and sufficient. Public accessible parking spaces exist on two sides of the building, with ramp entrances to the main entrance of the courthouse. The accessible parking spaces were typically clearly defined.

Entrances and Exits

The entryway is accessible. The entryway had two very extended ramp ways into the courthouse, for a total of approximately forty yards of ramps. The first half of the ramp was had a rest point halfway up, with railings on both sides. The ramp would be physically challenging for a person using a non-motorized wheelchair. The entryway was somewhat constricted, posing a challenge for persons with wheelchairs. The entry doors were non-automated. The entryway and exit are the same point, and present the same challenge of negotiating the door and ramps.



Security

Security officers, two at all times, are stationed immediately inside the entrance. Carry in items are searched and individuals are wanded. There is ample space for individuals in a wheelchair or scooter to maneuver this area.

The security officers, along with court administrators, would initiate established evacuation procedures in the case of an emergency.

Court Administration

Filing Counters

The clerk's counter would be challenging for persons with mobility or grasping disabilities due to its height.



Pamphlet and Informational Services

There are no pamphlet currently available describing services for persons with disabilities. Evacuation plans are prominently posted on each floor and are color-coded for ease of use and reference. Administrative staff assist members of the public, including persons with disabilities during any evacuations.

Interpretation services include a Spanish-speaking interpreter automatically available every Monday, and a Navajo-speaking interpreter every other Tuesday.

Restrooms

The team surveyed a representative sampling of restrooms in the courthouse, with emphasis on the main entrance restrooms. The restroom stalls had grab rails, but were small. Maneuvering with a wheelchair would be very challenging in some of the restrooms. The sinks were at a height high enough to use with a wheelchair, but had no heat wraps on the pipes. Soap dispensers were at the other side of the basin, difficult to reach for someone in a wheelchair. Extended wing handles, as opposed to shorter swivel handles, would be a helpful accommodation.



Hallways and Lobbies

All hallways were sufficiently wide with extensively available chairs and benches.

The water fountains were at wheelchair height and functional.



Elevators

None.

Law Library

The law library is available for use by attorneys admitted to the State Bar and is also used by judges and their staff. The law library is basically accessible, and on the day of visit, actually had a wheelchair in it.



Courrooms

First Main Courtroom

Courrooms are located on the first floor. The courtrooms are generally very accessible to members of the judiciary and public. A ramp leads up to the jury box and witness stand, with a railing along the side lip of the ramp. The first row of the jury box has fixed, nonremovable seats. A person using a wheelchair would need to simply rest the wheelchair immediately to the side of the first interior jury box chair. The space was sufficient to permit one wheelchair to do so.

The witness stand was at the top of the ramp, with a moveable chair on casters, easily removed to permit testimony from a witness using a wheelchair.



Access to both the jury deliberation room and the judicial chambers were both accessible and at the top of the ramp.

There was no gate separating the public gallery from the courtroom well, with wide, open passage.

Counsel tables had chairs on casters, again, easily moved to accommodate a wheelchair.

All courtrooms are set up for hearing assistance. Wireless headphones are used for this purpose.

The first row of the gallery was comprised of six chairs on casters, easily removed to permit wheelchairs of other mobility assistance devices.

The gallery had substantial room for a person using a wheelchair or other assistive equipment.

Public access to courtrooms appeared to be relatively easy. The handles were large and accessible for anyone using a wheelchair. There were no automatic door openers, but the doors seemed to open relatively easily.

Second Main Courtroom

A ramp leads up to the jury box and witness stand, with a railing along the side lip of the ramp. Again, the seats in the jury box are fixed, nonremovable. However, in this jury box, there would not be sufficient room for a person using a wheelchair to simply rest the wheelchair immediately to the side of the first interior jury box chair, since the space was insufficient to do so.

The witness stand was at top of the ramp, with a moveable chair on casters, easily removed to permit testimony from a witness using a wheelchair.

Access to both the jury deliberation room and the judicial chambers were both accessible and at the top of the ramp.



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The first row of the gallery was comprised of chairs on casters, easily removed to permit wheelchairs or other mobility assistance devices. The gallery had substantial room for wheelchair users or other assistive equipment.

Public access to courtrooms appeared to be relatively easy. The handles were large and accessible for anyone in a wheelchair. There were no automatic door openers, but the doors seemed to open relatively easily. Access to the jury deliberation area was floor level and therefore accessible.

First Supplemental Courtroom

The jury box was two rows of removable chairs, the first row at floor level. The witness stand is at floor level and fully accessible. Counsel tables were at an acceptable height, with chairs on casters. The public gallery had sufficient space for several wheelchairs.



Second Supplemental Courtroom

The supplemental courtroom is generally accessible, with the exception of the jury box. Both the jury box and witness stand were at a step up and were not accessible.

Juror Facilities

The jury deliberation room for the main courtroom was limited in space but generally accessible. The jury deliberation room restroom did not have toilet support rails or heat wraps on the sink wraps, but was instead a normal, pre-ADA restroom. The jury deliberation sign was in Braille.

The jury deliberation room for the first supplemental courtroom was small but generally accessible. Participation points at the deliberation table for jury members using a wheelchair would need to be near the entrance door.



Chambers

The team was afforded access to a representative chambers. There was ample room for any member of staff or visiting lawyer or member of the public to maneuver in a wheelchair or move with a walking device.

General Observations

All public signs in the building that the team observed were imprinted with Braille code.

Currently, no benches are wheelchair accessible. However, if necessary, Court Administration noted that accommodation could be made.

Similarly, and consistent with any budget demands, some consideration should be given to publishing a pamphlet for members of the public or those in the legal profession with disabilities. Court facility staff might benefit from more discussion concerning potential requests for access to a fully electronic courtroom by a party to a criminal or civil suit, where the party's disability may make use of a fully electronic courtroom more beneficial to the presentation of his or her case, but the assigned judge does not ordinarily use one.

CONCLUSION

The Navajo County and Justice Courthouse facility is an accessible building, both in its main areas of public use and in its courtrooms. Personnel responsible for administering the facility seemed appreciative and aware of and attuned to needs of persons with disabilities.

