

Beyond Compliance:

Creating a Culture of Inclusivity and Accessibility among Maryland State Courts and Legal Service Providers

Maryland justice system partners, including the courts and legal services providers, can enhance access to the civil justice system by communicating goals of inclusivity and accessibility, and by fulfilling those goals in operating courts and legal services programs. The civil justice community should comply with state and federal disability requirements, but, more than that, should strive to achieve meaningful justice for all through effective and accessible practices. This document does not articulate the standards that apply to courts and providers, as these may differ. Rather this document is intended to articulate general principles that should help courts and providers fulfill in practice the spirit with which the regulations were adopted.

The Maryland Access to Justice Commission recommends courts and providers adopt the strategies referenced in this document in order to provide:

- ❖ Accessible Websites
- ❖ Accessible Facilities
- ❖ Proactive Inclusivity Practices

ACCESSIBLE WEBSITES

- **Establish and post a policy that all court or organization websites will be accessible.**
- **Identify personnel responsible for website accessibility review.**
 - Create a position to coordinate and administer the organization’s accessible website policy.
 - Have each court and each provider identify a staff person to serve as the web page accessibility coordinator.
- **Provide training on web accessibility to all web page accessibility coordinators.**
- **Adopt the following tenets of website accessibility:**
 - All images, image maps and graphics have an alt tag or long description
 - Provide a “Skip Navigation” button so those using screen readers do not have to hear all the navigation links before proceeding.
 - Ensure text links clearly indicate what a link is supposed to do.
 - In tables, ensure the header and row identifiers are associated with each data cell, using HTML, so a person using a screen reader can understand the information, or provide the information from tables in a linear (text) format, as well.
 - Provide a contact link on all pages so users can request accessible services or make suggestions for improvement.
 - Follow the Section 508 Checklist for HTML provided by WebAIM.
- **Have the site tested regularly by persons with disabilities or disability advocacy groups.**

ACCESSIBLE FACILITIES

- **Establish and post a policy and plan for ensuring court and program facilities are accessible.**
 - Incorporate the recommendations of the Courthouse Access Advisory Committee of the U.S. Access Board in future courthouse design and planned renovations.
 - Select rented spaces that comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Americans with Disabilities Amendment Act (ADAA).
 - Require contractual providers who offer their services at their own site, to provide services in accessible locations.

- **Prominently display a web page with all the accessibility information users will need including:**
 - Links to Google Maps, public transportation directions and public access maps of each court or provider location.
 - How to request an accommodation.
 - Lists of ADA coordinators.
 - Policy on accommodations.

- **Review facilities and make necessary improvements that are possible with existing resources.**
Address:
 - Exterior access, entranceways, accessible parking.
 - Interior accessibility.
 - Public counters and key public use areas.
 - Courtrooms and specific function areas.
 - Access to raised elements.
 - Signage.
 - Restrooms, kitchens.

- **Provide resources to aid those with mobility or stamina limitations, where funding permits.**
 - Provide wheelchairs and/or scooters.
 - Provide benches and chairs in numerous areas, inside the facility and in its immediate environs.

PROACTIVE INCLUSIVITY PRACTICES

- **Provide outreach to all program or court users to ensure all are aware of the accessibility policies and practices of the program or court.**
 - Create a prominent place on the organization website for accessibility resources and information.
 - Create prominent signage that makes clear the organization or court's accessibility policies, on-site resources, and how to get help while in the building.

- **Take proactive steps to reach out to program or court users to identify their needs.**
 - Station floating intake specialists near building entrances and empower them to address a broad range of issues right then and there:
 - Give intake specialists headsets so they can speak to supervisors from the floor.
 - Give intake specialists IPADs or other handheld devices they can use to look up case information, check for income eligibility, arrange for an interpreter, or special accommodation without going to an office or standing at a desk.
 - Equip their handheld devices with the ability to take credit card payments for program or court fees, fines, or other payments.
 - Have the intake specialist dress in a distinctive manner so they can be easily recognized.