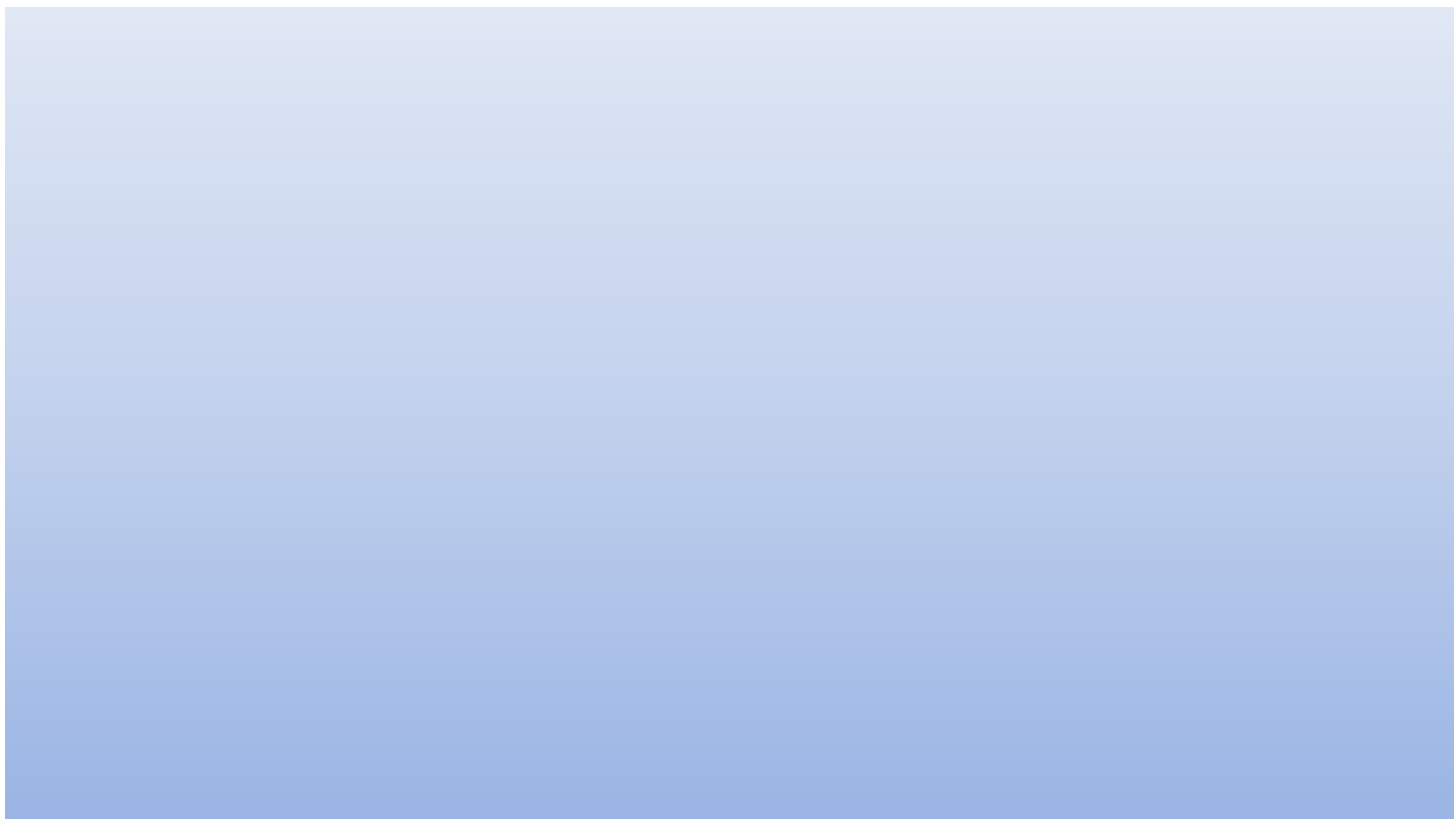


# 2021 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ADVISORY BOARD ON THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT



**2021 Members of  
The Advisory Board on the  
Americans with Disabilities Act**

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**This report is available in other formats, upon request.**

**Please E-mail [ADAProgram@jud.ct.gov](mailto:ADAProgram@jud.ct.gov) if you need this report in another format, and allow time for processing.**

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**2021 Annual Report to  
Chief Justice Richard A. Robinson  
From  
The Advisory Board on the Americans with Disabilities Act**

The Advisory Board on the Americans with Disabilities Act was established in 2011 as the successor to the Public Service and Trust Commission’s ADA Committee, as part of the first goal of the Strategic Plan. That goal, “*The Judicial Branch will provide equal access to all of its facilities, processes and information through the identification and elimination of barriers,*” drives the Branch to continue to ensure compliance with the ADA.

In 2021, the National Center for Access to Justice (NCAJ) at Fordham Law School released its “Justice Index 2020,” which assessed five areas to ensure access to justice, including access for people with disabilities. The Connecticut Judicial Branch and Hawaii shared the No. 1 ranking, finishing ahead of the other 48 states and the District of Columbia for disability access policies and procedures, including the delivery of services, communication, planning and design, and training and support.

The global pandemic has made the delivery of services challenging and the Branch has continued to be creative in its approach to ensuring access to justice for people with disabilities.

Judge Patrick L. Carroll III has chaired the Board since its inception, and there are representatives from each Judicial Branch division and the Supreme and Appellate courts. This report provides an update on the past year’s recommendations to increase or improve access and offers some new suggestions.

## **Ongoing Initiatives**

### **Training**

With more than 140 trained ADA Contacts, the Judicial Branch does its best to ensure that people with disabilities, both hidden and not, have access to someone who can assist them in requesting and securing accommodations. To ensure the trained staff members have current information, training is held periodically. Prior to the pandemic, the Judicial Branch conducted dozens of in-person trainings to staff and provided information on the ADA to the public via Legal Exchange programs. Currently, training for staff is conducted remotely via interactive meetings, or in online modules.

In 2021, several hundred Judicial Branch employees from all divisions completed ADA trainings, including:

- *The Nuts and Bolts of the ADA*, a Branch-created training on the Act, is completed by all new hires within six months, by employees seeking a refresher on Title II, and new ADA Contacts. Last year, 216 employees completed this online training.
- *Service Animals 101*, created by the Judicial Branch, teaches employees about the Department of Justice’s guidelines around service dogs. In 2021, 222 employees completed this online training.
- A mandatory “*Advanced ADA Training for Contacts*” was conducted for 69 Branch employees, to help ensure Contacts are well-versed in the Branch’s policies, procedures and services, including those for support people in proceedings both public and private and when a Confidentiality Agreement is necessary, as well as medical documentation and service animals policies.
- The New England ADA Center offers two online courses available to Judicial Branch employees: *The Overview of Disability Rights Law*, and *Fair Housing Act, Section 504 and the ADA*. In 2021, 45 employees took these online trainings.

Employees in the Court Support Services Division work with people on probation and those released from confinement, and the Division has developed a strong training network to support their employees in their specific roles. Many people with criminal histories have hidden disabilities such as PTSD. Among the training available for CSSD staff are:

- Mental Health and Co-occurring Disorders
- Youth Mental Health First Aid
- Borderline Personality Disorder
- Introduction to Trauma
- Building Resiliency/ Exploring Trauma

A remote training for 46 interns in the Judicial Branch’s Experiential Learning Program was conducted in September, giving information about the Branch’s obligations under Title II of the Act; the legal definition of disability; the basics of the accommodation request process; and service animals.

In November of 2021, Advisory Board member Sandra Lugo-Gines, who manages the Branch’s Centralized ADA Office, and Board support staff Heather Collins conducted a remote training session for the ADA Coalition of Connecticut’s annual conference. The 40 attendees, representing municipalities and other public facilities and state agencies, learned about how the Branch has evolved over the years to improve access for people with disabilities. The training included information on the development of a long-term strategic plan; developing and implementing policies that ensure compliance with the Act; making information about the request process easily and readily available both online and in person; the importance of training; and resources available including the New England ADA Center and the U.S. Department of Justice.

The Administrative Services Division, Human Resource Management Unit, provided Title I supervisory training to the Division Human Resources management staff in 2021.

Finally, the Centralized ADA Office continued to provide Contacts with information about training, policy updates, procedural changes, and other ADA-related news in a bi-monthly e-mailed newsletter, called “*E-News You Can Use.*”

## **Facilities**

During the 2020-2021 period, the architect firm of Antinozzi Associates was engaged to complete ADA Assessments of facilities in the Ansonia-Milford, Hartford, Middlesex, and New Haven judicial districts. The assessments, of public, staff, and detention areas, identified improvements by three categories:

- work to be completed by in-house maintenance staff,
- minor work to be completed by trade labor contractors, and
- capital improvement projects.

The remaining 30 courthouse locations have been divided into groups, made up of five locations in each group. Two on-call architects have been engaged to conduct assessments for the first two groups, with reports due 28 days after a site visit. The reports will again follow the same criteria as noted above, with the improvements defined by the three categories.

To date, reports have been received for the Hartford juvenile court and the GA-11 courthouse in the Windham Judicial District, and assessments are underway for GA-2 in Bridgeport and the New London Judicial District.

## **Law Libraries**

The Superior Court Operations’ Law Library Services Unit maintained and updated information on the ADA Resources page of the Judicial Branch website. Law Library Services continued to maintain and update Law by Subject pages pertinent to the ADA, including:

- Service Animals and the ADA
- Dog Law in Connecticut, Sec. 4 - Service Animals
- Comfort and Support Dogs for Witnesses, and in 2021, the Law Libraries added
- Special Education.

Additionally, all law libraries offered a handheld magnifying glass to assist patrons when reading print materials. In addition, law library staff were familiar with computer accessibility settings and utilized the appropriate settings to accommodate patrons using the public access computers.

## **Technology**

For many people, coming to court can produce anxiety and for some people with hidden disabilities, the experience can be especially daunting. In 2021, the Judicial Branch redesigned its ADA internet page to be more intuitive and user-friendly, breaking the information down to smaller pieces. This allows the public to find basic information about coming to court, and for people with disabilities to more easily learn how to request an accommodation, how to find a local ADA Contact Person for assistance, and to easily find forms, brochures, and other general information before they come to court, or call for assistance. Additionally, a new “*Quick Answers to Your Questions*” card was also posted on the page.

For staff, the Intranet ADA home page was redesigned to allow all Branch staff a simple way to answer the most basic questions about the ADA and includes grouped information on using auxiliary aids such as FM Kits and PocketTalkers; helping a person secure an accommodation; training; policies and guidelines, and who to contact for assistance.

The Branch also consolidated the process of scheduling American Sign Language (ASL) and Certified Deaf Interpretation (CDI) interpreters, and Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services for members of the public with the creation of an electronic request form for the benefit of Judicial Branch employees.

## **Purchasing Services**

The Judicial Branch relies on vendors to provide certain services to allow people with disabilities to access our programs and processes. In 2021, the Judicial Branch signed agreements with external vendors to provide Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services, and the remediation of legal forms to allow access to documents for people who are Blind or have low vision and use screen readers. Additionally, three vendors provide American Sign Language (ASL) and Certified Deaf Interpretation (CDI) for Deaf or Hard of Hearing people.

In 2021, sign language services were provided 332 times, while CART services were accessed 45 times.

## **Information**

The Judicial Branch’s Interpreter and Translator Services Unit translated the Branch’s ADA homepage, <https://jud.ct.gov/ADA/default.htm> into Spanish, Polish, and Portuguese, the three most requested languages from limited English proficient individuals.

## Future Initiatives

### Training

Training is the backbone of the Judicial Branch's continued compliance with the Act, and 2022 may bring back the opportunity to train in-person, on-site. However, the Branch will continue to develop training, including:

- In 2022, Connecticut Judges and Family Support Magistrates will participate in ADA training focused on Title II of the ADA, specifically on the concepts of reasonable accommodation and fundamental alteration of processes.
- A remote training session is in development for staff from the Centralized ADA Office to provide one-on-one initiation training for new ADA Contacts across all divisions. This interactive training will give newly-designated ADA Contacts the tools they need to aid the public.
- The Branch has previously been invited to provide Title II training on the Act to Probate Court officials and staff. If the public health crisis abates, this training may occur.
- The Administrative Services Division will continue to provide Title I training to supervisors.
- Resuming the popular "*Speaker Series: Interacting with Respect is Everyone's Job*" for staff. Previous years have featured speakers talking about mental health, hidden disabilities, and the culture of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities.
- Training for interns in the Experiential Learning Program.

### Information

- The Board will request the Interpreter and Translator Services Unit to translate the *Procedure for Members of the Public to Request and Accommodation Under the Americans with Disabilities Act* into Spanish, Portuguese, and Polish.
- The Judicial Branch will develop a brochure for members of the Bar on Title II of the ADA including information on how to request an accommodation.

### Facilities

- The Administrative Services Division's Facilities Unit has added an architect to its staff and his priority will be to review the ADA assessments cited above. Upon approval by the Department of Justice and the state Attorney General's Office regarding the three-category approach, the improvements will be initiated.