



Public Access and Accommodation Rights

Meeting the Needs of People with Disabilities

Understanding the Law

Do you know if your office's web site is accessible to the visually impaired? If a constituent needs a sign language interpreter when they visit your office, do you know whom to call? Do you know if the location of your last town hall meeting or field hearing was accessible to someone who uses a wheelchair?

Being able to answer these questions is more than an academic exercise. Understanding how to accommodate people with disabilities not only helps you and your office avoid a potentially embarrassing situation, but it also ensures that your office is

in compliance with the disability access and accommodation rights requirements of the Congressional Accountability Act (CAA).

The CAA protects individuals with dis-

abilities from discrimination with regard to access to public accommodations and the programs and services of public entities in covered locations and offices. These rights are distinct from discrimination against people with disabilities in employment, which involves *discrimination in hiring and the terms and conditions of employment* (which is also prohibited by the CAA).

Public access and accommodation rights ensure that members of the public with disabilities are able to access programs, activities, or places of public accommodation – such as public spaces in offices and hearing rooms – on an equal basis with the non-impaired. Offices of the Senate and the House of Representatives, committees of Congress, the Capitol Police, the Congressional Budget Office, the Office of the Architect of the Capitol, the Office of the Attending Physician, the Office of Compliance, and the Capitol Guide Service are all required to comply with this requirement in their publicly accessible spaces.

Taking the Basics Steps

There are many steps that individual Members' offices and committees can take in order to improve accessibility for people with disabilities and avoid potential discrimination. The few steps below are by no means exhaustive, but following them can help your office prepare for routine contacts with people with disabilities.

First, be sure you know where and how you can receive assistance when dealing with people with disabilities. Both the House ADA Services Office and the

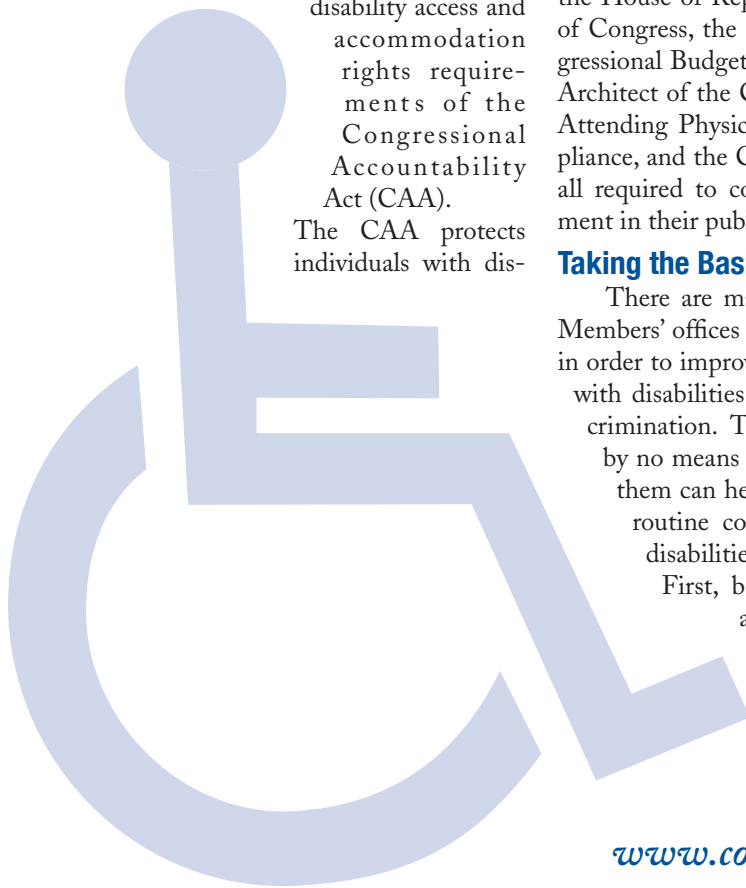
Congressional Special Services Office can assist you in making accommodations for people with disabilities. Be sure to keep staff aware of these services and keep the contact information for these offices readily available.

Next, ensure that your office is prepared to accommodate people with disabilities. At the most basic level, make sure that your office space can accommodate the disabled (such as someone in a wheelchair) by arranging furniture adequately to allow easy access in and around the office without special assistance. Also be sure when planning events – especially those not on Capitol Hill – to take into consideration whether necessary facilities are available (such as wheelchair ramps or interpreters) for the disabled.

One important consideration that is often overlooked when accommodating people with disabilities is your office's public web site. Although Congress is not required to comply with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, which requires that individuals with disabilities be able to access electronic information in a way that is comparable to access available to others, maintaining an accessible web site can be a great aid to constituents with disabilities. To find out if your site is Section 508 compliant, contact your web site manager or host.

Need More Information?

If you would like more information about disability access rights and how to accommodate people with disabilities, contact the Office of Compliance or your appropriate House or Senate authority. Our web site, www.compliance.gov, has additional information about disabil-



ity access and accommodation rights and Section 508 compliance.

Our web site also has a new printable poster (in PDF) available, *Resources for Accommodating People with Disabilities*, that has contact information for the offices available to assist you when working with visitors with disabilities.

Resources for Assistance

Congressional Special Services Office

Congressional Special Services Office (CSSO) provides services for constituents, staff, and visitors with disabilities. When needed for official functions, the CSSO can also provide assistance to district offices.

The Congressional Special Services Office is located on the first floor of the Capitol in the Crypt area directly below the Great Rotunda. For more information or assistance, call (202) 224-4048 (V) or (202) 224-4049 (TDD), 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

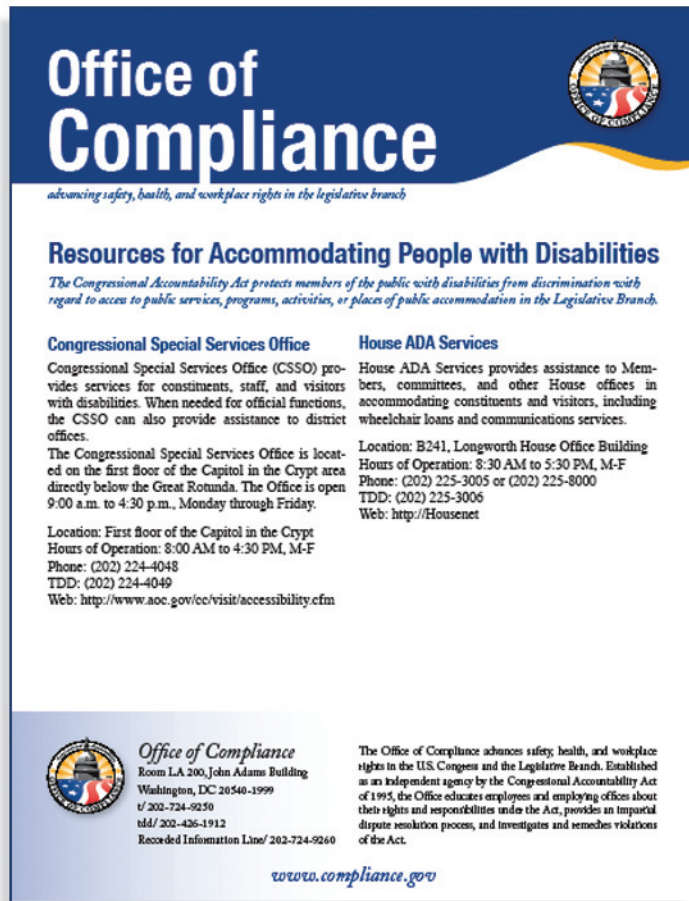
House ADA Services

House ADA Services provides assistance to Members, committees, and other House offices in accommodating constituents and visitors, including wheelchair loans and communications services.

House ADA Services can be contacted at (202) 225-3005 (V) or (202) 225-3006 (TDD), or by contacting First Call at (202) 225-8000.

Post this information in your office.

Download our *Resources for Accommodating People with Disabilities* poster now.



The poster features a blue header with the text "Office of Compliance" in large white letters. Below the header is a circular seal of the Office of Compliance. The main body of the poster is white with blue text. It includes the title "Resources for Accommodating People with Disabilities" and a subtitle: "The Congressional Accountability Act protects members of the public with disabilities from discrimination with regard to access to public services, programs, activities, or places of public accommodation in the Legislative Branch." The poster is divided into two columns of text. The left column is titled "Congressional Special Services Office" and provides contact information for the CSSO. The right column is titled "House ADA Services" and provides contact information for House ADA Services. At the bottom of the poster, there is a section for the "Office of Compliance" with its address, phone numbers, and website.

Office of Compliance
advancing safety, health, and workplace rights in the legislative branch

Resources for Accommodating People with Disabilities
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Room LA 200, John Adams Building
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t/ 202-724-9250
tdd/ 202-426-1912
Recorded Information Line/ 202-724-9260

The Office of Compliance advances safety, health, and workplace rights in the U.S. Congress and the Legislative Branch. Established as an independent agency by the Congressional Accountability Act of 1995, the Office educates employees and employing offices about their rights and responsibilities under the Act, provides an impartial dispute resolution process, and investigates and remedies violations of the Act.

www.compliance.gov

Please visit us at www.compliance.gov



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This information does not constitute advice or an official ruling of the Office of Compliance or the Board of Directors and is intended for educational purposes only. For further information, please refer to the Congressional Accountability Act (2 U.S.C 1301 et seq.) and the regulations issued by the Board, or you may contact the Office of Compliance.