

Equal Access in Public Spaces and Buildings

Is Your Office ADA Accessible?

On August 10, 1921, Franklin Delano Roosevelt fell ill with polio and was paralyzed from the chest down within three days. Eleven years later, despite his disability, FDR was elected President of the United States.

In the early-twentieth century, no law existed to guarantee President Roosevelt equal access to the Capitol Hill buildings in which he worked during his four historic terms of office. Today, equal access is guaranteed to all legislative branch employees and visitors through the Congressional Accountability Act (CAA), administered by the Office of Compliance (OOC).

The CAA stipulates that all legislative branch staff and visitors be granted the rights guaranteed by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) while either working in or visiting any part of the Capitol Hill complex, a District Office or a special event sponsored by a Member's office. Each employing office is responsible for ensuring that it provides this accessibility both within its own office space and at office-sponsored events open to the public.

Your Accessible Office: A Step-by-Step Guide

Step One - Take notice.

Walk through your office with the checklist on the other side of this *Bulletin*. Make sure all doorways leading to spaces that are open to the public are wide enough for a wheelchair. Make sure all signs that identify your office are understood by an individual with little or no sight. Make sure

all door thresholds and handles may be crossed over and operated, respectively, by an individual in a wheelchair.

Make certain you know how to direct a visitor with a disability out of the building in the event of an evacuation. In buildings with elevators, make sure you know the location of the staging area or area of rescue assistance.

Though not mandated by the CAA, you may wish to update your office's web site so it complies with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, which requires that electronic information be provided in a format that is clearly accessed by individuals with a disability. For more information, visit www.section508.gov or contact your web site manager. House of Representatives employees can also contact House Information Resources; Senate employees may contact the Office of the Assistant Sergeant at Arms and Chief Information Officer.

Step Two - Take action.

If you notice any problems, attend to them promptly. District Offices should contact their building's maintenance department or management company to arrange for necessary repairs and changes. House of Representatives employees on Capitol Hill should contact First Call, while Senate employees should contact the Architect of the Capitol.

When planning events in District Offices or on Capitol Hill, ensure that the meeting space can accommodate individuals with disabilities. Know what is involved in obtaining a sign language interpreter if one is requested.

The Congressional Special Services Office (CSSO) assists all staff of the Capitol, House of Representatives, and the Senate in making accommodations for people with disabilities. The CSSO offers wheelchair loans, arrangement for interpreting services, maps of accessible routes, and other information. When needed for special functions, the CSSO can also provide assistance to District Offices.



A rare photograph of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his wheelchair. The president is pictured with his dog, Fala, and a neighbor's daughter, Ruthie Bie, at Hilltop Cottage in Hyde Park, New York, 1941.

Step Three - Stay Pro-Active

ADA compliance is not an issue to consider only when an individual with a disability shows up at your office door. Perform regular inspections of your office to make sure it remains compliant and accessible. Ensuring access to all visitors and staff is not the sole responsibility of the Architect of the Capitol, an Office Manager, or a Supervisor. Make sure each employee knows who to contact should they be faced with an ADA issue; incorporate ADA training such as accessible communications and evacuation procedures into your office's orientation program; and regularly remind current staff of ADA procedures and the importance of ADA compliance.

More Information

Contact the Office of Compliance or visit www.compliance.gov for more information about disability access and how to accommodate employees and visitors with disabilities. You may also contact CSSO at (202) 224-4048 or www.aoc.gov/cc/visit/accessibility.cfm for specific questions or general information. House of Representatives employees may contact the Office of House Employment Counsel at (202) 225-7075; Senate employees can contact the Office of the Senate Chief Counsel for Employment at (202) 224-5424.

Looking Ahead

Much has changed since President Roosevelt attempted to hide his disability from the American public. As Senator Robert Dole noted in an August 4, 1995 address: "Our Nation has come a long way in its understanding of disability since the

days of President Roosevelt. For example, we recognize that disability is a natural part of life. We have begun to build a world that is accessible. No longer do we accept that buildings—either through design or

indifference—are not accessible, which is a 'Keep Out' sign for the disabled." Providing equal access to all legislative branch employees and visitors is just one demonstration of this more accessible world.

ADA Checklist

For all ADA-related repairs, employees of a District Office may contact their building's landlord or management company; Senate employees may contact the Architect of the Capitol; and House of Representatives employees may contact First Call.

- All door openings that lead to public spaces are at least 32 inches wide.
- All doorway thresholds are no more than 1/2 inch high.
- All door handles, latches, and locks can be grasped and easily opened with one hand.
- All interior doors can be pushed or pulled open with no more than 5 lbf (pounds of force).
- All accessible egress routes are at least 36 inches wide and have no steps in the building exit route. If the accessible building exit is on a different floor, know the building's plan to evacuate mobility-impaired individuals.
- All characters and background on signs contrast with each other.
- All characters and background on signs are non-glare.
- All raised and brailled character signage is installed on the wall adjacent to the latch-side of a door, and is mounted 60 inches above the floor.
- All signs are clear from obstructions such as flags, sign-in stands, or hall decorations.



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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.

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.