



The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): 36 Years of Progress and Ongoing Advocacy

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What Is the ADA?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a landmark civil rights law signed on July 26, 1990 that protects people with disabilities from discrimination and aims to ensure equal access and opportunity in everyday life.

The ADA was established to guarantee that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. The law recognizes that barriers in society often prevent people with disabilities from fully participating in their communities.

The ADA is divided into several sections, known as “titles,” that address different areas of public life:

Title I protects against disability discrimination in employment.

Title II covers state and local government services and transportation.

Title III applies to businesses and places open to the public.

Title IV addresses telecommunications access.

Title V includes additional protections and provisions related to enforcement and retaliation.

The ADA requires employers, schools, businesses, and public entities to provide reasonable accommodations and accessible environments so people with disabilities can participate fully and equally.

Why Is the ADA Important?

36 years since it was signed into law, the ADA remains one of the most important disability rights laws in United States history and continues to serve as a foundation for accessibility, inclusion, independence, and equal opportunity for millions of Americans.

Prior to the ADA, many public buildings and services were inaccessible and discrimination was rampant. The ADA helped change that by breaking down barriers and expanding opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Some of the many ways that the ADA has improved the lives of people with disabilities include:

- Students with disabilities gained greater access to inclusive education.
- Public buildings, sidewalks, and transportation systems became more accessible.
- Workers gained protections against discrimination and the rights to reasonable accommodations.



Current Threats to the ADA and Disability Rights

Although the ADA has made significant improvements for the disability community, there are currently efforts that could undermine the law and weaken disability rights, protections, and accessibility. Current concerns include:

- Efforts to weaken federal civil rights enforcement and oversight.
 - Example: The dismantling of the Department of Education and civil rights protections for students with disabilities.
- Attempts to reduce accountability for ADA violations.
 - Example: [Reductions-in-force](#) to the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, which oversees the enforcement of the ADA.

Any rollbacks to the enforcement or oversight of the ADA would be harmful for the entire disability community.

What Do I Do If I Witness or Experience a Violation under the ADA?

If a person with a disability experiences discrimination or is denied equal access, they have rights. You or someone else can:

- Document what happened, including dates, locations, and communications.
- Speak with a supervisor, business owner, school administrator, or ADA coordinator.
- Seek legal advocacy or support.
- File a complaint with a government agency.

ADA complaints can often be filed with federal or state agencies, depending on the type of discrimination. To file a complaint, you can:

- Contact the U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division:
<https://www.ada.gov/file-a-complaint/>
- Contact the Massachusetts' Attorney General's Office:
<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/americans-with-disabilities-act-rights-and-grievance-procedures>

Takeaways

The fight for the ADA was an uphill battle that took strong leadership, dedicated advocacy, and persistence. Although we still have work to do, the [history of the ADA](#) is an incredible example of what passionate advocacy can do for our community.

The ADA transformed millions of lives and helped build a more accessible and inclusive society. But the work is not finished. As we celebrate the 36th anniversary of the ADA, we honor the advocates whose leadership made this historic law possible and recommit to protecting and strengthening disability rights for future generations.



ADA Resources

There are many organizations and resources available. To find out more about the ADA and seek assistance, you can visit:

- DOJ's Civil Rights Division: <https://www.ada.gov/>
- ADA National Network: <https://adata.org/>
- Disability Law Center: <https://www.dlc-ma.org/>