



*Celebrating 23 Years of the ADA: A Message from the Acting Assistant Attorney General*

Twenty-three years ago this week, our nation committed to a comprehensive mandate to eliminate discrimination against people with disabilities by enacting the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Civil Rights Division is proud to play a critical role in enforcing the ADA, working towards a future in which all the doors are open to equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, integration and economic self-sufficiency for persons with disabilities.

In honor of the 23rd anniversary of the ADA, each day this week we have celebrated Department of Justice enforcement efforts that have opened gateways to full participation and opportunity for people with disabilities. Visit our ADA Anniversary Week webpage to learn more: <http://www.ada.gov/ada-23-anni.htm>.

In April 2013, the Civil Rights Division issued a report detailing recent accomplishments in enforcing federal laws that prohibit discrimination and uphold the civil and constitutional rights of all who live in America. As described in the Report, the Division achieved results for people with disabilities in over 1,600 actions under the ADA, including lawsuits, settlement agreements, and successful mediations from 2009-2012. The Report also describes the Division's extensive ADA technical assistance and outreach program. In the past four years, Division staff helped more than 200,000 people who called our ADA Information Line to learn how the ADA applies to them. In Fiscal Year 2012, the Division answered more than 60,000 calls. Click here for links to the Accomplishments Report pages detailing disability rights enforcement efforts <http://www.ada.gov/disability-rights-accomplishments.htm> (html) and <http://www.ada.gov/disability-rights-accomplishments.pdf> (pdf)

Equal opportunity for those with disabilities is a vision that the Division hopes will soon extend beyond our nation's borders. There are over 50 million Americans with disabilities, including 5.5 million veterans living abroad who frequently face barriers when they travel, conduct business, study, live or retire overseas. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities improves protections for persons with disabilities overseas, and allows the full range of U.S. accessibility rights and benefits to spread throughout the world. The Division continues to play an active role in the quest for U.S. ratification of the Convention to ensure additional gateways open for people with disabilities across the globe.

Here at home, we have come a long way in the journey for equal justice under the law for people with disabilities. We are frequently reminded, however, that -- in the words of the late Senator Edward Kennedy -- "the business of civil rights remains the unfinished business of America." The Civil Rights Division plays a critical role in helping the nation realize the promise of its founding principles. Over the past 23 years, the Division has continued our nation's journey toward equal justice. But we have more work to do. Today, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the ADA, I am happy to reaffirm the Division's commitment to the promise of equal opportunity for people with disabilities in the months and years to come.

  
Jocelyn Samuels