

# COMPLIANCE @ WORK

advancing workplace rights, safety & health, and accessibility in the legislative branch



## Accommodating Constituents With Disabilities

Individuals with disabilities have the right to equal access to legislative branch resources under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as applied by the Congressional Accountability Act (CAA). This equal access right includes, but is not limited to:

- the right to an equal opportunity to participate in and receive the benefits of legislative branch public programs, activities, and services;
- the right to physically access the facilities and buildings where these services are provided;
- the right to communication that is equally effective as it is for persons without disabilities; and
- protection from being excluded from participating in or receiving the benefits of programs, activities, and services on the basis of a disability.

Legislative branch entities that must provide such equal access include:

Senate and House Offices on Capitol Hill and in districts; Congressional Committees (including Joint Committees); the Office of Congressional Accessibility Services; the Capitol Police; the Congressional Budget Office; the Office of the Architect of the Capitol; the Office of the Attending Physician; and the Office of Compliance.

### Examples of the ADA at work on Capitol Hill:

- Visitors with visual disabilities can “see” rooms by hearing descriptions from specially-trained guides.
- The assisted listening system in the Library of Congress’s Pickford Theater allows amplified sound for both hearing aids and provided headsets.
- Ramps and elevators in Senate and House office buildings make hearing rooms accessible to individuals using wheelchairs.

For more information, see the OOC’s [publication](#):  
*Tips for Improving Office Accessibility for Individuals with Disabilities*

### What is a qualified disability?

A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity.

### How can legislative branch entities provide equal access?

Providing equal access will often depend on the type of access that is needed and an individual’s specific disability. For example, communication access may be provided by an auxiliary aid or service, such as sign language interpreting.



## Some ways offices can accommodate constituents with disabilities:

**WRITTEN DOCUMENTS**

Many Members of Congress require constituents to complete privacy release forms or written statements. If a constituent has a disability that impacts their ability to see or complete these forms, offices can provide them in alternative formats such as large print, braille, or an electronic format for those who use screen-reading software. Offices can also permit constituents to dictate their form responses and/or electronically sign and submit documents.

Other in-office accommodations for written documents include magnification devices and lighting adjustments for the visually impaired.

**AUDIO COMMUNICATION**

When Members conduct town hall meetings or give public speeches, sign language interpreting or assisted listening devices can be provided for audience members with hearing impairments. These types of auxiliary aids should also be available for Member meetings with hearing impaired constituents.

Hearing-impaired constituents often communicate by phone through the use of their TTY number.

If a Congressional office is contacted on the telephone by a person with hearing or speech difficulty, that individual may be using some kind of relay service.

Returning the constituent's phone call may involve calling a relay service to connect with their TTY number. There are several types of relay services available (public and private), including Internet

and telephonically-based systems. To connect with someone on their TTY number, first dial (866) 377-8642. For more information: [www.federalrelay.us/about-federal-relay](http://www.federalrelay.us/about-federal-relay)

**WEBSITES**

Websites and email provide easy options for communication. Videos and other audio materials should be captioned for hearing-impaired individuals, and audio options should be provided for visually-impaired persons.

**ADAPTED EQUIPMENT**

Some offices make computers, tablets, and other devices available for in-office constituent use. Offices can make these devices more accessible through hardware and software options. For example, talk-to-text software can be useful for persons with disabilities affecting their motor skills. Computers can also be outfitted with trackballs or joysticks to enable alternative modes of operation. If an office provides a phone for public use, it should be easy to hold or include a hands-free headset for persons with difficulty holding a phone. Offices should also ensure that

tablets and phones for public use are stationed at an appropriate height: no lower than 15" above the floor and no higher than 48" above the floor.

*The Office of Congressional Accessibility Services (OCAS) assists with providing accommodations for constituents. They can be reached at (202) 224-4048. For more information on OCAS, see right column.*



*OOO inspectors work with AOC officials to ensure ADA compliance on Capitol Hill.*



**ASSISTIVE LISTENING DEVICES AND SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS**



**DOCUMENTS IN BRAILLE, LARGE PRINT, AND ELECTRONIC FORMAT**



**WHEELCHAIRS FOR VISITORS ON STAFF-LED TOURS**

**"We can help offices find the resources they need. We never say, 'That's not us.'"**

— David P. Hauck, Director of Accessibility Services, Office of Congressional Accessibility Services