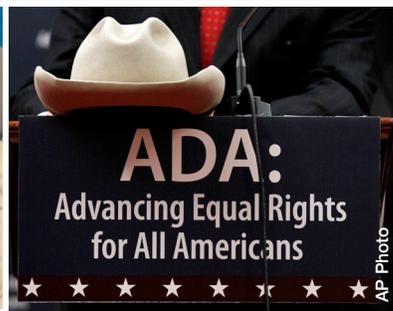


THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF CHANGING AMERICA AND INSPIRING THE WORLD



“The day I cast my vote for the ADA was one of my proudest days as a United States Senator. We knew it would lead to great changes in America. Only through time have we come to realize how important the ADA is internationally.”

– Secretary of State John Kerry

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life and promotes accessibility to jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public. The ADA was the world’s first comprehensive law guaranteeing equal rights to persons with disabilities.

The Fight for Disability Rights

The ADA confirms the vital role that civil society plays in American democracy; it is the story of civic activism encouraging legislative action that leads to enduring change over time. Drawing from the experiences of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, disability rights advocates in the 1970s began their long, hard fight for equal opportunity and reminded America that our heritage of equal rights for all requires equal access for all.

On July 26, 1990, more than 3,000 people gathered on the south lawn of the White House as President George H.W. Bush signed the ADA—the largest audience ever to witness a bill become law in the history of the United States.

“I now lift my pen to sign this Americans with Disabilities Act and say: Let the shameful wall of exclusion finally come tumbling down.”

– President George H.W. Bush

International Impacts

The ADA inspired the world to see disability issues through the lens of equality and opportunity. Soon after its passage, governments around the world began writing and enacting their own laws guaranteeing rights and access to their disabled citizens.

The ADA also influenced actions by international organizations, such as the Organization of American States and the European Union, to address discrimination faced by persons with disabilities. The ADA’s definition of disability and its recognition of the rights of individuals with disabilities to education, employment, health, transportation, and public access lie at the foundation of the world’s first international treaty on disability rights—the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Although the United States has not yet ratified the Convention, President Obama and Secretary Kerry fully support ratification.

“Equal access—to the classroom, the workplace, and the transportation required to get there. Equal opportunity—to live full and independent lives the way we choose. Not dependence—but independence. That’s what the ADA was all about.”

– President Barack Obama

American Values and Disability-Inclusive Diplomacy

The Secretary’s Special Advisor for International Disability Rights leads our engagement around the world. Multi-year projects have been launched this year in Armenia, Kenya, Mexico, and Vietnam. United States diplomatic missions, from our largest embassies to our smallest consulates, work to present America’s heritage as a champion of human rights, including the rights of persons with disabilities. The United States Department of State supports these efforts with programs reaching every geographic region. The 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act represents a unique opportunity to support disability advocacy around the world and affirm America’s historic leadership in the fight for the rights of persons with disabilities.