





# Access to Minnesota State Courts for People with Disabilities During the COVID-19 Pandemic

- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Minnesota Human Rights Act (MHRA) prohibit discrimination based on disabilities. These laws require state and local governments to ensure that people with disabilities have meaningful access to the services that they provide.
- The courts are one of the essential services that state and local governments provide, and the ADA and MHRA require them to be accessible to people with disabilities. The United States Supreme Court recognized that barriers to accessibility in our judicial system have historically “had the effect of denying disabled people the opportunity to access vital services and to exercise fundamental rights guaranteed by the Due Process Clause.” *Tennessee v. Lane*, 541 U.S. 509 (2004).
- Among other requirements, the ADA and MHRA require courts to make “reasonable accommodations” and “reasonable modifications” to rules, policies, and procedures to ensure that people with disabilities have meaningful and equal access to the services that courts offer. Examples of reasonable accommodations in the court system include providing American Sign Language interpreters for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, allowing a service animal to accompany a witness, or altering court schedules to accommodate a disability-related medical need.
- The ADA and MHRA continue to apply during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the state courts have limited activity across the board due to the pandemic, they are still required to ensure that people with disabilities have meaningful access to hearings and other proceedings that are still being conducted. The meaningful access requirement applies whether proceedings are being conducted in-person or remotely.
- If you are a person with a disability who has an upcoming court hearing, you may be entitled to a reasonable accommodation. Examples of accommodations for remote proceedings include live captioning for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, and ensuring that electronic documents are accessible for people with vision impairments.
- More information on the process of requesting an accommodation in Minnesota courts is available here: <http://www.mncourts.gov/ADAaccommodation.aspx>. You may also call the Clerk of Courts in the County where you live to request an accommodation.
- If you would like more information on reasonable accommodations in the courts, have been denied a reasonable accommodation, or have another legal issue related to your disability, please contact the Minnesota Disability Law Center at 1-800-292-4150. We are open during the COVID-19 pandemic, and may be available to assist you.

**The Minnesota Disability Law Center (MDLC), a division of Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid, is Minnesota’s Protection and Advocacy System for people with disabilities. MDLC has created this information sheet about common issues and how to address them. Our office is available to help – Call us at:**

 **612-334-5970**

 **1-800-292-4150**



**If you have questions about any notices, changes in service, or meetings: please call us at the Minnesota Disability Law Center: 612-334-5970 or 1-800-292-4150.**