

New Hampshire Courts January 2006

Status of physical accessibility

District Courts

25 of the 36 district courts have been evaluated by CLK - most have accessibility issues. All but 13 have submitted access checklists* completed by the Clerk of the Court.

Two district courts, housed in the same building, are not accessible to NH citizens with walking disabilities: Berlin and Gorham. This is unacceptable.

Hampton District Court, which is not accessible, is being relocated to an accessible facility in Seabrook.

The most common accessibility issues are, listed in terms of severity:

1. Restrooms that are not wheelchair accessible
2. Double-leaf doors with each door less than 32 inches wide
3. Insufficient maneuvering space between two doors – usually the “sound lock” between the lobby and the courtroom
4. Doors that are too heavy to open (exceed 5 pounds of force to pull)
5. Rear door entrances
6. Elevator cabs too small and/or elevator controls not within reach from a wheelchair
7. Parking spaces are not configured properly, usually lacking adjacent access aisles
8. No wheelchair access to the Witness Stand or Judge’s Bench

CLK has not yet evaluated the 11 remaining district courts. Of those, complaints have been received on Merrimack District Court.

*The access checklist was created by Cheryl L. Killam and in 2005 it was distributed by Chief Justice Broderick to all courts.

Superior and Probate Courts

Nine of the eleven superior courts have been evaluated by CLK. Carroll, Cheshire, Coos and Rockingham County Courthouses have no or very minor accessibility issues. All but Hillsborough North and Sullivan County Superior Courts have submitted access checklists completed by the Clerk of the Court. All but Belknap, Cheshire, and Hillsborough County Probate Courts have submitted access checklists completed by the Clerk of the Court.

Hillsborough North and Hillsborough South County Courthouses have not been evaluated by CLK.

The accessible entrance for Belknap County Courthouse is in the basement. There are no accessible restrooms in Belknap and Sullivan County Courthouses and in Stratford County the restrooms are not up to code. Grafton County Courthouse has double-leaf doors that are each not wide enough, the sound lock does not provide enough maneuvering space between sets of doors, and the ramp into the courtroom is too steep. In all of these courthouses, there is very limited or no access to the Jury Box, the Witness Stand, and the Judge's Bench.

Supreme Court

- The accessible entrance to the Supreme Court is a rear entrance.
- The double-leaf doors in all corridors and into the courtroom are each not wide enough. The sound lock to the courtroom does not provide enough maneuvering space between doors.
- The gates from the gallery into the well of the courtroom are too narrow which prevent a person using a wheelchair from entering the well. There is an alternate entrance for the well, but this requires exiting the courtroom and walking down the corridor, through double-leaf doors that are too narrow, and entering the courtroom through the accessible door on the side of the well.
- There are no accessible public-use restrooms on the main floor.

- Access into the law library requires passing through double-leaf doors, with each leaf being less than 32 inches wide.
- The cab of the elevator in the law library is very small and the elevator controls are too high to reach from a wheelchair.
- There is an accessible restroom in the basement.

Only in a few courthouses were the holding areas evaluated. Access is provided to/from the courthouse/courtroom and within the holding areas but not one cell has an accessible water closet/sink unit nor are accessible toilet rooms provided within the holding areas.

NH courthouses should comply with the accessibility design requirements of:

1. The NH State Building Code and
2. The Architectural Barrier-Free Design Code of NH and
3. The most recent version of the Life-Safety Code of the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA 101) and
4. The Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG)

Where there is a conflict between codes, the code that is most stringent, thus providing the best access, is to be followed, unless the conflict is with NFPA 101, which always takes precedence.

The U.S. Access Board has convened the Courthouse Access Advisory Committee which will submit its report to the Board by early 2007. Cheryl Killam is a member of the CAAC. The design standards used for this guidance material are those found in the U.S. Access Board AB-ADAAG, published and released in July, 2004.

Communication Access:

Assistive Listening Devices are required but are not provided. All employees should be trained on how to use NH Relay. Sign Language Interpreters and Translation Services

Access to Programs and Services

Large-print materials are required.

Alternative formats, such as Braille, computer disc and audio-tape must be available upon request.

Physical access to public-use computers, informational brochures, and public data is required.

The Judicial Branch's *Self-Help Center* on the web must be accessible for people who are blind or visually impaired [508 compliance].