

House Prevention of Discrimination Panel  
February 4, 2022  
Minutes

## OVERVIEW

House Discrimination Prevention Panel met with disability rights leaders to hear testimony about access and accommodation issues for people with disabilities interacting with the legislature, in person or online.

- Sarah Launderville  
Executive Director, Vermont Center for Independent Living
- Rachel Seeling  
Director, Disability Law Project  
Vermont Legal Aid
- Susan Aranoff  
Senior Policy Analyst  
Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council

Three areas of concern were expressed regarding attitudes, communication, and physical access. Training for State House staff and legislators is needed to more appropriately interact and welcome visitors with disabilities. Reasonable accommodations are essential for public hearings in person as well as online. The website needs to become more accessible: using plainer language, ASL videos, compatibility with screen readers, linking to Livestreams clickable, and having a clearly identified site where accommodations requests can be made.

An access audit is needed regarding the State House's physical access as well as understanding fuller ADA guidelines if the building is expanded. Even with expanded committee rooms, many are still too small for people who use wheelchairs. Accessible parking is inadequate for the public, and should more appropriately be called Accessible and not Handicap parking. As well, the ADA entrance to the building is often locked on Saturdays.

## DETAILS:

Susan Aranoff

- Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council
- Get access for people with disabilities and family in the State House
  - o Trying to invite people with disabilities to the State House on any other day than just "Disability Day"
- State House needs improvements:
  - o Website
    - § Streaming links & explanations are difficult to find/understand
    - § Need some plainer language

- o Bringing people in & out of the building
  - § Can be very hard to people with disabilities
  - § No alternatives/accommodations
- o People in chairs were told they had to sit out and listen on Disability Awareness Day rather than be allowed into the well of the house

Rachel Seeling

- Director of Disability Law Project at Vermont Legal Aid
- American's with Disabilities Act (ADA)
  - o Title 1-employer/employee relationships
  - o Title 2-public entities
  - o Title 3-places of public accommodations
- Title 2 would focus on the State House
  - o Effective communication
    - § Best practice would be a live captioner
  - o Service animals
    - § However there are specifics
- Could have screens read to people in order to make it easier
  - o However screens are covered in a lot of writing so it is hard for screen readers
- Hyperlinks are easier for screen readers to navigate
- Visual description during Zoom/YouTube meetings

Sarah Launderville

- Executive Director of Vermont Center for Independent Living & President of Vermont Coalition of Disability Rights
- There needs to be proper training for staff (ongoing)
- Disability etiquette training
- Not creating laws that are potentially harmful to those with disabilities
- Disability Awareness Day experiences
  - Having ways in which people can request accommodations
- Better public hearing instructions & accommodations
  - o People need to be understanding of these accommodations
- Better parking spaces
- Committee rooms are too small
- Chemical sensitivity-chemical free zone
- Ensure accessible entrances are unlocked
- Moving away from the word handicap