

AWARENESS OF THE  
AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

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## AWARENESS OF THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

The famous statesman Patrick Henry voiced words that still ring an important right we as Americans prize, *"Give Me Liberty, or Give Me Death..."*

43 million Americans with disabilities seek liberty in ways that the normal citizen takes for granted. Those with a disability actually desire capability to function in society equal to you and me. In 1990, Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act to address the fact that there are persons in our country who are discriminated against in ways that many would never notice. This act is as sweeping and far reaching as the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Liberty for the disabled is addressed in four ways:

### 1. Liberty in accessibility

For many persons with disabilities, barriers exist that prevent them from being able to access the many businesses and services in our communities. Governmental buildings, restaurants, stores, and the other myriad of places persons enter each day may have barriers that prevent some such as curbs, stairways, rest rooms, doorways, and water fountains. The ADA strives to have each of us *"put ourselves in their shoes"* to see if our buildings are accessible. One restaurant owner borrowed a wheelchair and entered his establishment as a customer would. *"I was amazed to find how many barriers there really were,"* he explained. *"Curbs, narrow doorways, and the salad bar was too high,"* he continued. *"We're actually keeping some potential customers out because of our building."*

Liberty is sought first of all through change in the physical barriers, but it doesn't stop there.

### 2. Liberty in employability

Americans with disabilities have the right under the ADA to apply for employment and cannot be refused because they are disabled, however, an employer has the right to review the abilities of the applicant and determine whether he/she can perform all the tasks required. A grocer may have a job that requires lifting 75 pound bags of pet food that a person in a wheelchair may not be able to accomplish. That person is not qualified to be hired for that job. The same grocer may have a cashier's position that a person could perform, but may require some changes or reasonable accommodations in counter height, or being able to work in the check-out area in a wheelchair. Persons with disabilities want to work. Many times the only barrier to liberty in employment may be minor changes in work space or fixturing.

To make this vision of liberty a complete picture, a third piece must be added.

### 3. Liberty in communicability

How does a person who is deaf and mute order a pizza? What about someone who has had a stroke and lost their ability to speak? How do they communicate with a relative who lives many miles away? The ADA seeks liberty in communication for persons with disabilities. In our age of electronic gadgetry, this can be accomplished with TDDs (telecommunications devise for the deaf and other relay services). A person who is deaf can plug their devise into a public phone or from home and either call the operator who will translate the information or be able to contact the business or person directly. Communication which we use each day must also be made available to the disabled to access.

To complete the picture, one final important brush stroke must be added.

#### 4. Liberty in mobility

Employment may be available. Buildings are accessible. A person with a disability may call a reservation into a restaurant, but how do they get there? The ADA seeks accessibility of public transportation. Buses and other public vehicles are to be fitted with lifts and spaces for wheelchairs to be locked into place for travel. Americans love their mobility. Citizens with disabilities are no different and accessibility in transportation offers this freedom.

#### Conclusion:

This 4-fold plan has been developed to integrate persons with disabilities into the mainstream of society to bring independence instead of the deathtrap of isolation. During the civil rights movement, Martin Luther King emotionally proclaimed to Americans, *"I have a dream."* He pointed to a day when blacks and whites would work and live together. The ADA looks to a future, a dream when persons with disabilities are seen just as that, persons. Their disability will be nothing more than something that is unique about them as a person. They in agreement with Patrick Henry say to American society, *"Give me liberty, freedom to enter buildings, have gainful employment, to converse and travel like the many non-handicapped in our country."* The ADA is the right thing to do. The time is now to give complete emancipation to this deserving segment of our society.

#### Need More Information?

The following resources are given to aid you in answering questions you may have concerning the ADA:

#### Indiana (state-wide)

*The Governor's Planning Council for People With Disabilities - 1-800-536-4ADA*

#### Kosciusko County

Warsaw Public Library - (219) 267-6011

Video - *Nobody's Burning Wheelchairs* - Various ADA regulations and guidelines published by the Federal Government.

#### Employment

Kosciusko Assessment and Placement Services (KAPS), a division of Cardinal Center, Inc. Contact Virginia Britten (219) 267-3823.

#### Communication

Michigan Bell, Special Needs Center - 1-800-433-8505

#### Transportation

Kosciusko Area Bus Service (KABS) - a division of Cardinal Center, Inc. Contact Gretchen Sons (219) 267-4990.

*"The strength of a society is directly related to the care and empowerment afforded to its weakest citizens."*

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