

Justice Department Signs Agreement with Wilson County, North Carolina, to Ensure Civic Access for People with Disabilities

WASHINGTON - The Justice Department today announced an agreement with Wilson County, N.C., to improve access to all aspects of civic life for persons with disabilities. The agreement was reached under Project Civic Access (PCA), the department's wide-ranging initiative to ensure that cities, towns and counties throughout the country comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

"The ADA is 20 years old this month, and I commend Wilson County officials for making this commitment to take the necessary steps to ensure equal access to civic life for the county's residents with disabilities," said Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. "The Civil Rights Division is committed to vigorous enforcement of the ADA, and the 20th anniversary of the ADA should be a wake-up call to state and local officials across the country where the ADA's promises of equal access have not yet been realized."

Under the agreement announced today, Wilson County will take several important steps to improve access for individuals with disabilities, such as:

- * Making physical modifications to facilities surveyed by the department so that parking, routes into the buildings, entrances, service areas and counters, restrooms, public telephones and drinking fountains are accessible to people with disabilities;
- * Surveying other facilities and programs and making modifications wherever necessary to achieve full compliance with ADA requirements;
- * Ensuring that buildings and outdoor facilities that will be built or altered by or on behalf of the city comply with the ADA's architectural requirements;
- * Officially recognizing North Carolina telephone relay service as a key means of communicating with individuals who are deaf, are hard-of-hearing, or have speech impairments and training staff in using the relay service for telephone communications;
- * Undertaking the required planning and modifications to ensure equal, integrated access to emergency management for individuals with disabilities, including emergency preparedness, notification, evacuation, sheltering, response, clean up and recovery;
- * Developing a method for providing information for interested persons with disabilities concerning the existence and location of the city's accessible services, activities and programs; and
- * Installing signs at any inaccessible entrance to a facility directing individuals with disabilities to an accessible entrance or to information about accessing programs and services at other accessible facilities.

"We appreciate the commitment to equal access and ADA compliance made by each of the 180 cities, counties and other government entities that have entered into a Project Civic Access agreement with the Justice Department," said Assistant Attorney General Perez. "This initiative is a priority for the Civil Rights Division, and we will be actively pursuing similar commitments from other government officials in the weeks and months ahead."

Wilson County is located in Eastern North Carolina. According to census data, the county has approximately 73,814 residents, and more than 27 percent of those residents are individuals with disabilities.

Today's agreement was reached under Title II of the ADA, which prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities by state and local governments. The investigation of Wilson County was initiated in response to a complaint alleging that certain of the county's facilities were not accessible. The agreement requires most actions to be completed within two years. The department will actively monitor compliance with the agreement, which will remain in effect until the department has confirmed that all required actions have been completed.

PCA was initiated to ensure that persons with disabilities have an equal opportunity to participate in civic life, which is a fundamental part of every day life in America. As part of the PCA initiative, Justice Department investigators, attorneys and architects survey state and local government facilities, services and programs in communities across the country to identify the modifications needed for compliance with ADA requirements. The agreements are tailored to address the steps each community must take to improve access. This agreement is the 180th under the PCA initiative.

More information about the Civil Rights Division and the laws it enforces is available at the website www.justice.gov/crt<<http://www.justice.gov/crt>>. More information about the ADA, today's agreement with Wilson County, the Project Civic Access initiative, and the ADA Best Practices Tool Kit for State and Local Governments is available on the ADA home page at www.ada.gov<<http://www.ada.gov>> or at the toll-free ADA Information Line at 800-514-0301 or 800-514-0383 (TTY).