

33 Years of the ADA: Increasing Access, Inspiring Our Future

The ADA turns 33! With every anniversary, there is reflection – on what the ADA has achieved and how it challenges us to go even further for disability rights.

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Steve Locke

with Disabilities Act turns 33 this week! With every anniversary, there is reflection – on what the ADA has achieved, and more importantly, how it raises the bar and challenges us to go even further for disability rights. How do we do even more to ensure access and inclusion? What does the next generation of advocacy and activism look like?

Today, people with disabilities have legal protections that people pre-ADA could only dream of. Public spaces are more accessible than ever to people with various disabilities. “Disability pride” is shedding age-old stigmas

and embracing the diversity that disability brings to our world. Yet, laws improve access, but don’t guarantee it. People with disabilities still face plenty of physical, digital, and social barriers that make everyday life more difficult. Awareness increases our society’s knowledge about disability, but doesn’t eliminate disparities in employment, healthcare, housing, and more that affect people with disabilities. The ADA’s enactment in 1990 changed our entire culture for the better, but it’s far from a panacea, and we must consider what comes next.

As an organization led by people with disabilities and charged with representing and advocating for Michigan’s disability community, we have seen the ADA’s tremendous impact, and we go to work each day knowing that true access is still elusive for too many people with disabilities. The Centers for Independent Living provide essential resources for people with disabilities on topics from housing and employment to independent living. They also guide employers and municipalities in promoting inclusion, and provide vital support to families and caregivers. These CILs are central to ensuring people with disabilities have access to a full range of available services.

We have also developed a State Plan for independent Living that goes beyond the minimum standards for access that the ADA protects to create communities where people with disabilities

are valued and included, not simply accommodated. Our SPIL uses feedback from Michiganders with disabilities, advocacy organizations, and others to identify issues that impact the lives and livelihoods of people in the disability community. With the current SPIL, we are focusing on direct care worker retention, emergency preparedness plans for people with disabilities, and underserved populations within the disability community, including people of color, Blind people, and aging residents. This living document is our roadmap for disability advocacy throughout Michigan.

The ADA is the cornerstone of today's policy and cultural approach to disability, and it deserves all of the celebration and recognition we can offer. After 33 years, it must also be considered history. This foundational law was groundbreaking in 1990, but standards and ideals must evolve just as they have for other civil rights movements. We are the advocates who will shape this evolution and the new norms and ideals for disability rights and access. Together, we can envision and create a more inclusive future. Learn more about the Centers for Independent Living and MISILC partners here!

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