



## IS YOUR BUSINESS ACCESSIBLE? to wheelchair users & others with disabilities

Chicago's **Human Rights Ordinance** requires every business that serves the general public to make its services, products, and facilities accessible on an equal basis to people who use wheelchairs due to disability, to the extent possible without undue hardship.

- Existing and new businesses are covered. No business is “grandfathered.”
- Compliance with the Building Code is not enough. The Department of Buildings does not inspect for compliance with the Human Rights Ordinance.
- You can provide less than full wheelchair access if you can prove undue hardship by objective evidence; e.g., you can prove physical impossibility and/or prohibitive cost.
- Even if it is an undue hardship to make structural changes, you must provide reasonable accommodations for wheelchair users to the extent possible without undue hardship.
- Examples of reasonable accommodations include a portable ramp, a bell or buzzer to call for assistance, curb service, telephone or internet service, arrangements with a neighboring business to use their accessible restroom, and staff training.
- You may need to place signage at your entrances and notices in your advertising to inform people of any limited accessibility and your alternative arrangements.
- Carrying or lifting a wheelchair user is not a permitted accommodation.
- Federal and state discrimination laws have similar accessibility requirements.

Violations of the Human Rights Ordinance are punishable by

- Fines up to \$500 per incident, paid to the City of Chicago.
- Damages and attorney fees, paid to the complaining party.
- An injunction ordering you to take specific actions to meet ordinance requirements.

A wheelchair user who claims you did not provide full or reasonable access to your business may file a disability discrimination complaint against you at the Commission on Human Relations. The Commission may also initiate a complaint. The Commission investigates and rules on each discrimination complaint through a neutral process which gives you the opportunity to present evidence and legal arguments to support your position.

# SOURCES OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR DISABILITY ACCESS

*This list of organizations and web sites is offered as a starting point for businesses looking for information about affordable ways to comply with the Chicago Human Rights Ordinance and other laws requiring public accommodations to be accessible to persons with disabilities. It is not a guarantee of service, and these are not necessarily the only sources of such assistance.*

## **Great Lakes ADA Center**

1640 W. Roosevelt Road, Chicago, IL 60608

(312) 413-1407 and (800)-949-4232 (Voice/TTY), [www.adagreatlakes.org](http://www.adagreatlakes.org)

Provides information, problem solving assistance, and referrals for implementing the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other laws requiring accessibility for people with disabilities. It is one of ten regional centers funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, a division of the U.S. Department of Education. It operates out of the Department of Disability and Human Development under the College of Applied Health Sciences at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

## **Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD), City of Chicago**

Architectural Services Unit

121 North LaSalle Street, City Hall, Room 1104, Chicago, IL 60602

(312) 744-4441, TTY (312) 744-4964, [www.cityofchicago.org/disabilities](http://www.cityofchicago.org/disabilities)

Division of City of Chicago government. It provides consultative services and technical assistance to business owners, architects, and developers who are renovating or building a residential or public accommodation facility. Professional staff answer questions about the rights and responsibilities of business owners, employees, and consumers under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Fair Housing Amendments Act (FHAA), Illinois Accessibility Code (IAC), Chicago Building Code, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

## **City of Chicago Department of Community Development**

Small Business Improvement Fund, (312) 744-0678

The Department of Community Development administers the Small Business Improvement Fund which provides grants to businesses for improvements to small business properties in select Chicago neighborhoods. The program uses Tax Increment Financing (TIF) revenues to help owners of commercial properties and tenants within specific TIF districts to repair or remodel their facilities. Assistance is available to make improvements to accommodate patrons or workers with disabilities.

## **Access Living**

115 W. Chicago Ave., Chicago, IL 60610

(312) 640-2100, TTY (312) 640-2102, [www.accessliving.org](http://www.accessliving.org)

Not-for-profit organization which works to integrate people with disabilities into community life. It has an information and referral service which can help locate products and services to support accessibility. Call and ask for the Information and Referral Coordinator, or possibly submit a question through Access Living's web site.

## **Illinois Attorney General**

*Illinois Accessibility Code Site Inspection Checklist*, a 24-page booklet available at [www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/rights/access0203.pdf](http://www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov/rights/access0203.pdf)

## **U.S. Department of Justice**

The ADA Home Page at [www.ada.gov](http://www.ada.gov) has many informational publications such as:

- *ADA Guide for Small Businesses*, 15 pp
- *Checklist for Readily Achievable Barrier Removal*, 15 pp
- *Commonly Asked Questions about Service Animals in Places of Business*, 3 pp
- *Communicating with Guests Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing in Hotels, Motels, and other Places of Transient Lodging*, 2 pp