



Overview of Disability Laws

There are several laws that protect the rights of people with disabilities. You have the right not to face discrimination because of your disability...at work, at school, at home and in public places. Discrimination means being treated differently or unfairly. It also means refusing to make changes that could help you participate, like putting ramps on buildings where there are steps. Most disability laws define disability as having a physical or mental impairment that causes you to need help with at least one area of your life, such as work, walking, hearing or learning.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)



The ADA says it is not okay for anyone to discriminate against you because of your disability on your job, in government programs and buildings, in public places and transportation and in telecommunications (telephones, television, computers).

Fair Housing Act

The Fair Housing Act says it is not okay for anyone to discriminate against someone because of their race, color, religion, sex, disability, familial status, or national origin. You are protected by this law in private housing and public housing and you are protected if you are buying or renting your home. Under this law, you can make some changes to your home so that you can live there (examples include ramps, wider doorways, visible smoke detectors) and if you live in an apartment building, you can ask to have these changes made to the common areas of the complex. Who pays for these changes depends on the type of housing you live in.



Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act

The Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act requires voting places (called polling sites) to be physically accessible to people with disabilities and requires states to have voting aids for voters who are disabled and elderly (examples are magnifying glasses and talking voter machines for those with vision disabilities and lower machines for those using wheelchairs).

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

Section 504 protects you from discrimination in any program or activity that receives Federal money (includes schools, public housing and transportation, public libraries).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) says that public schools have to provide an education that is free and appropriate for all students with disabilities. Education must be given in what's called the "least restrictive environment", meaning as close to your home as possible and with your peers, with and without disabilities, as much as possible. If a student has a disability that makes it more difficult to learn, the school must work with the parents and the student to create an Individualized Education Program (IEP).



For help or to get more information about your rights under any of these laws, you can call the disAbility Law Center.