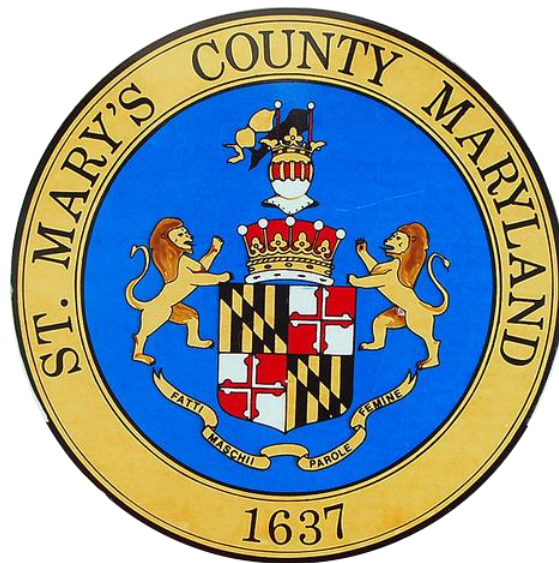


St. Mary's County  
Commission on People with Disabilities  
2021 Annual Report



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## **History**

The St. Mary's County Commission for the Disabled was established on April 16, 1991, by the Board of County Commissioners for St. Mary's County, Maryland through the adoption of resolution 91-11 and codified as chapter 156 of the code of St. Mary's County, Maryland.

On January 29, 2002, the Board of County Commissioners for St. Mary's County, Maryland renamed the commission to the Commission on People with Disabilities and revised the membership.

On January 26, 2010, The Board of County Commissioners for St. Mary's County, Maryland adopted by-laws for the commission and increased its membership.

On June 21, 2011, the Board of County Commissioners for St. Mary's County, Maryland restated the establishment of the Commission on People with Disabilities and increased citizen membership.

Currently the Commission meets the third Thursday of every month at 4 p.m. in room 14 of the Potomac Building. The Department of Human Resources provides staff support.

## **ADA Overview**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became law in 1990. The ADA is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including employment, education, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the public.

The purpose of the law is to make sure that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. The ADA is divided into five titles or sections that relate to different areas of public life.

### **Title I-Employment**

- Designed to help people with disabilities access the same employment opportunities and benefits as people without disabilities.
- Applies to employers with 15 or more employees.
- Requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations to qualified applicants or employees. A “reasonable accommodation” is a change made that accommodates employees with disabilities without causing the employer any “undue hardship”.
- Defines disability, establishes guidelines for the reasonable accommodation process, addresses medical examination requirements and inquiries, and defines “direct threat” when there is a risk of substantial harm to the health and safety of the employee with a disability or others.

### **Title II-Public Services: State and Local Government**

- Prohibits discrimination based on disability by “public entities” such as programs, services, and activities operated by state and local governments.
- Requires public entities to make their programs, services, and activities accessible to individuals with disabilities.
- Outlines requirements for self-evaluation and planning: making reasonable modifications to policies, practices, and procedures, where necessary to avoid discrimination; identifying architectural barriers; and communicating effectively with people with hearing, vision, and speech disabilities.

### **Title III-Public accommodations and services provided by public entities**

- Prohibits places of public accommodation from discriminating against individuals with disabilities. Public accommodations include privately-owned, leased, or operated facilities, such as hotels, restaurants, retail merchants, golf courses, doctor's offices, schools, day cares, health clubs, sports stadiums, movie theaters, etc.
- Sets minimum standards for accessibility for alterations and new construction. It also requires public accommodations to remove barriers in existing buildings where it is easy to do so without difficulty or much expense.
- Directs businesses to make "reasonable modifications" to their usual ways of doing business when serving people with disabilities.
- Requires that business to take the necessary steps to communicate effectively with customers with hearing, vision, and speech disabilities.

### **Title IV-Telecommunications**

- Requires telephone and internet companies to provide a nationwide system of interstate and intrastate telecommunication relay services that allows individuals with hearing and speech disabilities to communicate over the telephone.
- Requires closed captioning of federally funded public service announcements.

### **Title V-Miscellaneous provisions**

- Contains a variety of provisions relating to the ADA, including its relationship to other laws, state immunity, its impact on insurance providers and benefits, prohibition against retaliation and coercion, illegal use of drugs, and attorney's fees.
- Provides a list of certain conditions that are not to be considered as disabilities.

## **Introduction**

Formed by the Commissioners of St. Mary's County in response to the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the St. Mary's County Commission on People with Disabilities (COPD) exists to increase acceptance, awareness, and full participation in all aspects of county life, including the quality of life for persons with disabilities. Additionally, the COPD has the responsibility of providing advice to the Commissioners of St. Mary's County and to improve awareness and inclusion of people with disabilities.

## **Public Events and Accomplishments 2021**

2021 continued to be affected by the global COVID-19 Pandemic which impacted the lives of St. Mary's County residents as well as the normal operations of the Commission. One meeting was canceled, and several others were conducted only via conference call. Fortunately, in the beginning of the year, the Commission members were able to meet in-person following social distancing guidelines and room capacity limits. Besides these challenges, the Commission on People with Disabilities was able to work on some of the continuing Goals from the previous year.

- Increase membership
  - The COPD lost a few long-time citizen members but added several new ones during 2021. Monthly meeting attendance was consistent and the option for attending via teleconference continued in addition to resuming in person meetings.
- Public Awareness
  - In 2021 commission members attended numerous in person meetings hosted by the St. Mary's Chamber of Commerce to continue the relationship developed with the Chamber throughout the previous year. The Commission is still planning to host a Business After Hours event in collaboration with another agency or business in the future.
  - The commission initiated a request to provide Closed Captioning for St. Mary's County Government meetings held in the Commissioner meeting room including captioning in real time and adding captions to previously recorded meetings. This invaluable service will benefit all residents with hearing impairments especially seniors in our community.
  - The Commission provided feedback and recommendation to assist St. Mary's County Transit System (STS) in the development of their updated ADA Paratransit Transportation Application. All St. Mary's County residents with disabilities will have to submit the new application once it is completed to be approved to receive ADA bus services.
  - Annual Holiday Party- the 2021 annual holiday party was canceled due to social distancing guidelines, concerns for the safety of our participants, and continued closure of the venue for the event, the Loffler Senior Center.

- Provide support to the ADA coordinator for St. Mary’s County.
  - The Commission members supported the county government office during their search for a new ADA coordinator. The position was advertised in late March of 2021 and the new coordinator assumed responsibilities in November of 2021.
- Appreciation
  - Each year the Commission on People with Disabilities and community partners conduct an Awards Ceremony to celebrate those in our community that have demonstrated excellence in supporting individuals with disabilities. The Commission was able to plan and present the 2021 Award Ceremony on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021. Several exceptional county residents and organizations were honored, including Joe St. Clair, Texas Roadhouse, Debra Bowles, Crystal Haislip and the Arc of Southern Maryland, Mary Randall\*, and Jahaun Lee for their service to the disabled community.  
\*Posthumously. An American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter was also present at the ceremony to accommodate any residents with hearing impairments.

## **Goals for 2022**

- Increase membership and member participation
- Participate in in-person Public Awareness activities
- Provide support to the ADA coordinator for St. Mary’s County
- Appreciation/ Annual Award Ceremony



## **Conclusion**

During 2021 the Commission was able to meet in person and participate in several awareness events and activities. Most of the meetings allowed for a teleconference option in addition to the in-person attendance. We were able to bring back into focus our purpose, increased awareness, fair treatment, and inclusion for people with disabilities over the coming years. Thank you to the Commissioners of St. Mary's County for your continued support of the Commission on People with Disabilities. Thank you to the Department of Human Resources for your support in staffing and training. A very special thank you to each member of the Commission on People with Disabilities for your efforts as a member of the Commission and your efforts in our community and thank you to all the organizations and people who have dedicated their lives and careers to helping others. Our hope is that during 2022 our activities will flourish, and the Commission will increase awareness and inclusion of people with disabilities.

Appendix A



2021 Awards Ceremony



Awareness Month Proclamation

National Disability Employment



31<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act