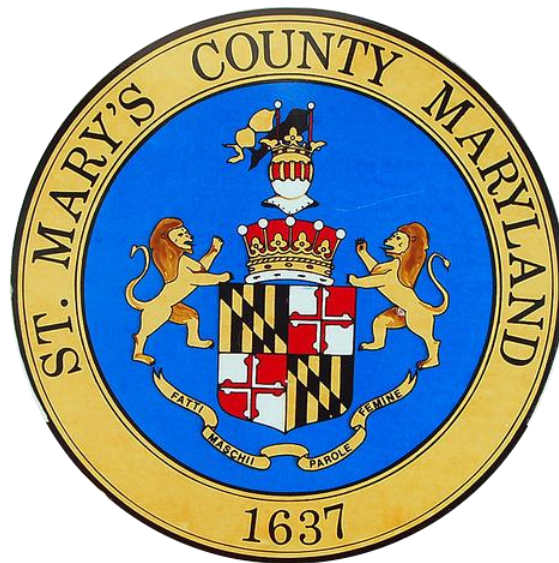


St. Mary's County
Commission for People with Disabilities
2024 Annual Report



Commissioners of St. Mary's County

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History

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

On January 29, 2002, the Commissioners renamed the commission to the Commission on People with Disabilities and revised the membership.

On January 26, 2010, the Commissioners adopted by-laws for the commission and increased its membership.

On June 21, 2011, the Commissioners restated the establishment of the Commission on People with Disabilities and increased citizen membership.

On May 10, 2022, the Commissioners renamed the Commission *on* People with Disabilities to the Commission *for* People with Disabilities and revised the meeting schedule.

Currently the Commission meets the third Thursday of every other 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.
- Require employers to provide reasonable accommodation 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.
- Require 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 accommodation includes 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 accommodation 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 businesses 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.

***This overview of the ADA is not intended to be used as legal advice.**

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 for People with Disabilities (CFPD) 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 CFPD 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 2024

The Commission met both in person and via Zoom. This format increased participation in our meetings so that a quorum was attained at each meeting. We also continue to use closed captioning to assist those in attendance.

- **Officers**

- In January 2024, the officers' election was held. John Eid was elected the Chairperson; Keegan Zimmerman was elected as the Vice Chairperson and Robin Johnson was elected as Secretary.

- **Meetings**

- In 2024, the CFPD met in January, March, May, July, September, and November. During several of these meetings, representatives from County Departments reported on their accommodation and inclusion efforts.
- **March** – Chirsty Bishop, Recreation and Parks – Lexington Manor
- **May** – Sarah Smith, Sheriff's Office- The Disability Community and Traffic Safety
- **July** – Pathfinders for Autism – Traffic Safety Program
- **November** – Allison Swint, DPT&W – ADA and STS

During several meetings Building Services' initiatives both planned and unplanned were also presented. Examples include revising the entry to the

Potomac building so that the ramp is wider and less steep and improving the sidewalks, curbs and striping all throughout the Governmental Center for safer access. The County should be very proud of the way departments work together to achieve a successful ADA effort.

- **Commissioner Meetings**

- In March and October of 2024, proclamations highlighting developmental disabilities awareness and disability employment awareness were presented to the Commission by the Commissioners of St. Mary's County.

- **Public Outreach**

- The Commission worked with staff to update the Disability Etiquette Handbook. The Handbook is frequently requested by individuals and organizations. The Handbook is available at the County Libraries and at other supporting organizations. The Handbook is also available on the County website. The Commission is proud of this project and pleased that we can offer this resource to the citizens of St. Mary's County.
- The Commission participated in the County Fair. We met citizens, responded to questions, and pointed people to appropriate resources. Commission members also attended community events including Juneteenth and the Torch Run for Special Olympics.

- **ADA Support**

- Provide support to the ADA coordinator for St. Mary's County.
- Each meeting the County's ADA Coordinator provides status or action items of issues concerning individuals with disabilities.

- **Appreciation**

- Each year the Commission for People with Disabilities and community partners hosts an Awards Ceremony to celebrate those in our community who have demonstrated excellence in supporting individuals with disabilities. The Commission planned and presented the 2024 Awards at a Ceremony with the County Commissioners on October 22, 2024. Two exceptional county residents were honored:
 - **Care Partner Award – Latisha Queen**
In Recognition of exceptional caregiving and support to the people she serves.
 - **Innovative Program Award –Alison Guy**

In recognition of an innovative plan for inclusion for people with disabilities in the community.

Goals for 2025

- To participate in Public Awareness activities.
- To provide support to the ADA coordinator for St. Mary's County.
- To continue the Appreciation/ Annual Award Program.
- To continue to provide advice to the County Commissioners and to help improve the quality of life for people with disabilities.

Conclusion

- A very special thank you to our county support staff, especially to Catherine Pratson and Cindy Slattery for their efforts and support to the Commission for People with Disabilities.
- And thank you to each member of the Commission for People with Disabilities for your efforts and service to our community.
- Thank you to all the organizations and people who have dedicated their lives and careers to helping others, especially those individuals with disabilities.
- Thank you to the Commissioners of St. Mary's County for your continued support to the Commission for People with Disabilities.
- Our hope is that in 2025 our activities will flourish, and the Commission will increase awareness, inclusion and increase the quality of life for people with disabilities.