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Justice Department Announces Americans with Disabilities Act Barrier-free Health Care Initiative by Us Attorney's Offices Nationwide

U.S. Attorney's offices across the nation are partnering with the Civil Rights Division to target their enforcement efforts on a critical area for individuals with disabilities through a new Barrier-Free Health Care Initiative, the Justice Department announced today. The announcement comes on the 22nd anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which was passed on July 26, 1990. Assistant Attorney General Thomas E. Perez announced the new initiative today at an event celebrating the anniversary of the ADA in Washington, D.C.

This new initiative will make sure that people with disabilities, especially those who are deaf or hard of hearing, have access to medical information provided to them in a manner that is understandable to them. The Barrier-Free Health Care Initiative is a multi-phase plan that will also involve other key issues for people with disabilities, including ensuring physical access to medical buildings.

"Access to health care remains an area of critical need for too many people with disabilities, especially those who are deaf or who have hearing loss," said Assistant Attorney General Perez. "The Barrier-Free Health Care Initiative will make sure people with disabilities are capable of physically accessing medical buildings and facilities and are not discriminated against when it comes to receiving potentially life-saving medical information. I look forward to continuing to work with U.S. Attorneys to advance ADA compliance efforts nationwide."

The Civil Rights Division and U.S. Attorney's offices have long enforced the ADA in this area. This nationwide initiative seeks to focus and leverage the department's resources together and aggregate and echo the collective message that disability discrimination in health care is illegal and unacceptable. Already, 35 U.S. Attorneys have committed to this initiative.

The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Michigan, in partnership with the Disability Rights Section, recently entered into a large-scale settlement agreement with Henry Ford Health System to ensure effective communication for people who are deaf or who have hearing loss throughout its entire extensive system of hospitals and medical facilities. Additionally, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of New Hampshire continued on its string of successes in achieving compliance in New Hampshire hospitals when it filed a complaint and consent decree against a major hospital in Keene, N.H., for its failures to provide effective communication and for its discriminatory decision to require a deaf patient's hearing mother to serve an interpreter for her daughter.

“These settlements ensure that deaf and hard of hearing patients can communicate with their doctors and obtain equal access to medical treatment, especially at critical moments in their care,” said Barbara McQuade, U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan. “This nationwide initiative emphasizes that disability discrimination in health care is illegal and unacceptable.”

For more than 15 years, U.S. Attorneys have been a critical force multiplier with the Civil Rights Division in enforcing the ADA through the U.S. Attorney Program for ADA Enforcement with the Disability Rights Section. Eighty-four U.S. Attorney’s offices across the nation currently participate in this critical and unique partnership effort and have resolved hundreds of matters involving core issues ranging from accessible voting, access to places of public accommodation and state and local governmental facilities, and discriminatory policies, practices and procedures.

Information about the Barrier-Free Health Care Initiative and the U.S. Attorney Program for ADA Enforcement can be found at www.ada.gov .

Component(s):

Civil Rights Division

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