



Empowering people with all disabilities by providing: Resources, Options, And Disability related Services needed To obtain individual Freedom in their lives.

www.cilncp.org

Williamsport City Hall For ALL!!

A landmark civil rights agreement has been filed in federal court to upgrade Williamsport, Pennsylvania's City Hall to meet federal Americans with Disabilities Act standards. The agreement is especially significant because of City Hall's age; it was built between 1888 and 1891, and is registered as an historic building. City Hall is central to the town's civic affairs; it houses multiple City government departments such as finance, public works, fire, human resources, recreation, codes and police departments. City Council and the Mayor's Office are located in City Hall.

On July 15, 2020, advocacy organizations and individuals with disabilities sued the City of Williamsport in federal court describing violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.¹ The lawsuit's focus has been on the absence of an accessible entrance to City Hall, nonexistence of visible fire alarm signals and emergency exit signage and other issues. The suit claims that for years the City has knowingly disregarded its obligations under federal accessibility laws requiring access to a safe, unencumbered path of travel into and throughout its City Hall building.

Plaintiffs include two organizations: the Roads To Freedom Center for Independent Living (RTFCIL), which serves persons with disabilities throughout the Commonwealth's Centre, Clinton, Lycoming, Montour, Northumberland, Snyder, Tioga, and Union counties. RTFCIL is a non-profit organization that advocates and promotes independent living for all persons with disabilities. Also a plaintiff is ADAPT, North Central Pennsylvania, the local chapter of a national grass-roots community that organizes disability rights activists to ensure the civil and human rights of people with disabilities to live in freedom. Several members of the Williamsport community also sue: Thomas Grieco, Tima Cummings; Jay Harner; and Marie Prince.

The lawsuit points out that the City's non-compliance affects thousands of citizens of Williamsport, as well as visitors to the City. 17% of the civilian non-institutionalized population of

¹ <https://www.sungazette.com/news/top-news/2020/07/center-for-independent-living-adapt-file-ada-lawsuit-against-city-of-williamsport/>

Williamsport are disabled.² Of the 4,667 total number of people with disabilities in the City, 3,362 of the City's population have ambulatory difficulty.³

Plaintiffs are represented by attorneys David Ferleger, and Thomas H. Earle of Philadelphia.

Today, the City and plaintiffs requested federal district judge, Hon. Matthew W. Brann, to approve a consent decree which requires the City to pay plaintiffs \$55,000 in compensatory damages, to construct an accessible ramp at City Hall's main Fourth Street entrance, ensure that the elevator is accessible, and provide emergency fire alarms which the deaf and hard of hearing can perceive. In addition, the City will comply with all other ADA requirements throughout City Hall, including for bathrooms, electric switches and doors. The court order applies both to the current City Hall and to any replacement locations for any City services. The City, which denies liability, will pay the plaintiffs' attorneys' fees.

RTFCIL Chief Executive Officer, Misty Dion hailed the agreement, "as a long overdue victory for the Disability Community and the beginning of a more inclusive Williamsport." Shaylin Sluzalis, ADAPT organizer, explained, "no longer are people with disabilities voices silenced in Williamsport. As involved residents and members of the Williamsport community, it is our prerogative to hold our government accountable to their civil rights obligations. The first action is ACCESS, and we thank the City of Williamsport for owning up to their obligations to ensure it."

In cooperation with the plaintiffs, the City will adopt a written workplan to provide for timely ADA compliance which includes:

- a. Compliance of the accessible ramp entrance to City Hall and elevator system compliance within eight months of the approval of this Consent Decree.
- b. Fulfillment of remaining City Hall compliance within one year of the approval of this Consent Decree, or

The ramp will "ensure non-discriminatory accessible access to City Hall through a ramp and to upper floors by an accessible elevator system." There will be an "accessible entrance/exit ramp

2

https://data.census.gov/cedsci/all?q=disabilities%20williamsport%20pa&g=1600000US4285312&hidePreview=false&tid=ACSST5Y2018.S1810&vintage=2018&layer=VT_2018_160_00_PY_D1&cid=S1810_C01_001E=

3

https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=disabilities%20williamsport%20pa&g=1600000US4285312&hidePreview=false&tid=ACSSE2018.K201803&vintage=2018&layer=VT_2018_160_00_PY_D1&cid=S1810_C01_001E

for City Hall at the Fourth Street side, integrated with the building design. It shall be available for use by anyone entering or exiting City Hall. The ramp shall start at street level, and end with entry into the public entry area of City Hall.” The City and plaintiffs specifically agreed that “provision of the ramp is of the highest priority and that time is of the essence.”

To implement the agreement, the parties agreed to many other provisions, including that:

1. The City will retain a licensed architect or other professional trained and experienced in Accessibility Standards to survey and provide a written report on City Hall ADA compliance, and steps to be taken as well as to furnish continuing advice to the City.
2. The City will adopt a workplan for compliance with the agreement, with milestones spaced over the implementation period. to ensure that access is maximally and incrementally afforded during the process. “The workplan shall provide for maintenance of effort. Maintenance of compliance shall be a permanent obligation of the City under this Consent Decree.”
3. “A Joint Committee (“JC”) will be established by the Parties with two members appointed by Plaintiffs and three members appointed by the City.” The committee will advise the City during development of the workplan and may suggest provisions for the workplan.” The workplan schedule will be updated in writing on a monthly basis to reflect (a) work completed, (b) modifications resulting from any changes. The schedule will be maintained on the City’s website.
4. The City will employ or designate a consent decree coordinator, reporting directly to the Mayor.
5. The City will provide to City staff hands-on awareness training to communicate the experience of a person with disabilities in various settings.
6. The City will maintain an effective complaint procedure for grievances. The easy-to-access procedure will be available for residents and visitors to request installation, improvements, and repairs regarding City Hall access.
7. The City and plaintiffs agreed to a process for resolving disputes, including first efforts for discussion and mediation if needed and, absent resolution, presentation of any issues to the Court.

MISTY DION
ROADS TO FREEDOM CIL, CEO
mdion@cilncp.org
(570) 367-6269

SHAYLIN SLUZALIS
ADAPT Organizer
ssluzalis@gmail.com
(570) 777-0268

Plaintiffs' lawyers:

DAVID FERLEGER
david@ferleger.com
215-498-1777

THOMAS H. EARLE
thomasearle@libertyresources.org
215-620-3347

Roads to Freedom CILNCP

24 East 3rd Street - Williamsport, PA 17701

Voice: (570) 327-9070

Toll Free Voice: (800) 984-7492

Video Phone: (570) 279-4590

Fax: (570) 327-8610