



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL  
ONE ASHBURTON PLACE  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02108

MAURA HEALEY  
ATTORNEY GENERAL

(617) 727-2200  
(617) 727-4765

[www.mass.gov/ago](http://www.mass.gov/ago)

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Today marks the 26<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act—groundbreaking legislation that promises equality in employment, public services, and public accommodations for individuals with disabilities. Today also marks one year since the Attorney General announced the formation of a Disability Rights Advisory Committee comprised of experts and advocates that have since been advising the office on matters pertaining to access, inclusion, and equality for individuals with disabilities throughout the Commonwealth.

With the help of the Committee's advice and insights, as well as input from the general public, we have been able to continue and improve upon our disability rights work across a number of Bureaus and Divisions in the office. The following are highlights of the work the office has undertaken since Attorney General Healey was sworn in eighteen months ago:

- The Civil Rights Division has handled approximately 500 calls and complaints from residents regarding disability-related rights. These calls and complaints have led to numerous mediations, including agreements securing injunctive relief, such as staff training and the implementation of nondiscrimination policies, and thousands of dollars in restitution and penalties, in cases involving housing and public accommodations.
- The Civil Rights Division is currently investigating or litigating at least six housing discrimination cases in which large-scale landlords failed or refused to provide reasonable accommodations to tenants with disabilities.
- The Consumer Advocacy and Response Division attended or organized seven educational and outreach events across the Commonwealth tailored for individuals with disabilities. Nearly 900 residents attended the seven events.
- The office just entered into a first-of-its-kind settlement agreement with Pursuant Health and the National Federation of the Blind that will result in thousands of self-service health care kiosks becoming accessible to consumers who are blind or visually impaired. The agreement also requires payments totaling \$95,000 that will be used to further improve access and opportunity for consumers with disabilities. *For more information, see [www.mass.gov/ago/news-and-updates/press-releases/2016/2016-07-26-ago-nfb-pursuant-health.html](http://www.mass.gov/ago/news-and-updates/press-releases/2016/2016-07-26-ago-nfb-pursuant-health.html).*

- The office created a grant program, *Innovating to Improve Access and Opportunity*, that funded projects that will use technology and innovative design to improve access and opportunity for individuals with disabilities in the fields of employment, education, transportation, and health care. The program was funded with the proceeds of our settlement with Cardtronics, Inc., which also required the company to make as many as 100,000 ATMs nationwide accessible. The projects awarded grants include the Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital for a handicapped parking space finder application, The National Braille Press for a new editor application for Microsoft Word with advanced word processing functions for a braille computer, and the WGBH Educational Foundation for a free, high-quality video captioning tool. *For more information, see <http://www.mass.gov/ago/news-and-updates/press-releases/2016/2016-05-02-improve-access-opportunities-grant.html>.*
- In April 2016, the office submitted comments in support of the EEOC's regulatory efforts to strengthen and clarify federal agencies' obligations to make affirmative efforts to employ people with disabilities. *For more information, see <http://www.mass.gov/ago/docs/civilrights/comment-on-eeoc-aa-for-people-with-disabilities.pdf>.*
- In celebration of Sunshine Week, in March 2016 the Division of Open Government created and published an online training video focused on accessibility at public meetings. *For more information, see <http://www.mass.gov/ago/news-and-updates/press-releases/2016/ag-announces-new-resources-as-part-of-sunshine-week.html>.*
- The Fair Labor Division promulgated regulations implementing the Commonwealth's new earned sick time law and published materials to help workers and employers understand the new law. *For more information, see <http://www.mass.gov/ago/doing-business-in-massachusetts/labor-laws-and-public-construction/earned-sick-time/>.*
- The Health Care Division is actively monitoring behavioral health parity in insurance coverage. As a result of these efforts, in February 2016, the office reached a settlement with Tufts Associated Health Plans, Inc. requiring coverage for autism-related services. The settlement requires Tufts to reimburse members who paid out-of-pocket for services and pay \$90,000 to the Commonwealth, including \$65,000 to be distributed to programs to improve care and treatment related to autism. *For more information, see <http://www.mass.gov/ago/news-and-updates/press-releases/2016/settlement-reached-with-tufts-associated-health-plans-over-restricting-access-to-treatment-for-autism-spectrum-disorder.html>.*

- In August 2015, the office entered into a settlement with Sunset Properties LLC in Springfield stemming from allegations that it discriminated against a tenant by, among other things, failing for more than a year to grant her request for a wheelchair ramp. The settlement required Sunset Properties to maintain a ramp for the tenant, have staff attend fair housing training, implement a reasonable accommodation policy, and pay \$15,000. *For more information, see <http://www.mass.gov/ago/news-and-updates/press-releases/2015/2015-08-05-sunset-properties-settlement.html>.*
- In June 2015, the office published a report, *Examination of Health Care Cost Trends and Cost Drivers*, analyzing the administration of behavioral health benefits and reimbursement for behavioral health services in the Commonwealth. *For more information, see <http://www.mass.gov/ago/news-and-updates/press-releases/2015/2015-06-30-health-care-report.html>.*
- The Government Bureau successfully defended the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination's ability to investigate and adjudicate the issue of an employer's obligation to provide equal long term disability benefits for mental and physical impairments. *See Sirva Relocation LLC v. Richie*, 794 F3d 185 (1st Cir. 2015).
- The office has committed to becoming a model employer of people with disabilities. We recently joined Work Without Limits and hosted the National Alliance on Mental Illness in a presentation of its *In Our Own Voice* program. We have also been training public-facing staff on etiquette for interacting with constituents and coworkers with disabilities.
- The Civil Rights Division just added a video to its main web page, *AG's Role in Civil Rights*, providing an American Sign Language translation of the contents of the page as well as instructions for filing a civil rights complaint. *See <http://www.mass.gov/ago/consumer-resources/your-rights/civil-rights/ags-role-in-civil-rights.html>.*

So much of the work we do depends upon strong relationships with our partners throughout the Commonwealth. We thank you all for your contributions and look forward to the year ahead.