

**PREPARED REMARKS OF
ACTING ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL BRADLEY J. SCHLOZMAN
PROJECT CIVIC ACCESS CELEBRATION
JULY 25, 2005**

It is a pleasure for me to be with all of you today. This year we have the honor of celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The ADA is a resounding success story ; it has opened doors and torn down barriers that once prevented millions of individuals from making their full contributions to American life. Because of the ADA, people with disabilities are no longer relegated to the background, but are instead actively participating in the forefront of America's future.

As one of his first acts in office, President Bush issued his New Freedom Initiative, which was designed to improve the lives of millions of Americans with disabilities. At the heart of the New Freedom Initiative is a deep and abiding commitment to full implementation of the ADA. A promise that people with disabilities will gain the freedom to work, to play, and to participate as full members of their communities.

We in the Civil Rights Division take the President's challenge seriously. Since the beginning of this Administration we have achieved results for people with disabilities in over 1,600 actions, including lawsuits, settlement agreements, letters of resolution, and successful mediations. Our efforts will continue until the promise of the ADA becomes a reality.

Achieving compliance is our core mission. It involves a coordinated effort of technical assistance, alternative dispute resolution, and where necessary, litigation. It also involves laying the foundation of trust with the disability community and building cooperative relationships with local governments and businesses.

For example, through our ADA Business Connection we are creating partnerships between people with disabilities and businesses. More than 50 million Americans with disabilities – 18% of our population – are potential customers for businesses of all types across the United States. This group, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, has \$175 billion in discretionary spending power. By the year 2030, 71.5 million Baby Boomers will be over the age of 65 and in need of products, services, and environments that address their age-related physical changes. In all candor, even at age 34, I find myself occasionally in need of such products and services. By working together, these groups are learning that accessibility is about more than the law. It's about expanding markets - dollars and cents. (Even a lawyer can do that simple math)

To enhance our ADA business connection efforts, I am announcing today a new ADA online course entitled, "*Reaching Out to Customers with Disabilities.*" This interactive course is designed to educate small business owners about their obligations to, and the benefits of serving, customers with disabilities. The course is available on our ADA.gov website, which has proven to be a powerful tool in providing technical assistance to businesses and local governments. In fact, it had over 29.3 million hits last year.

I'd like now to turn to another set of partnerships, which is the main focus of our ceremony today – the network of partnerships between the Department of Justice and state and local governments that make up Project Civic Access. Project Civic Access is a Department of Justice initiative to promote accessible public buildings, programs, and services. Already through PCA, more than 1 million Americans with a disability now live in accessible communities. PCA agreements involve countless hours by Department investigators, attorneys, and architects, who work in conjunction with local governments, to identify facilities and services needing modifications. The final result is an agreement, reached outside of the courtroom, that takes the steps necessary to make core government functions more accessible.

Today I am pleased to announce 22 new agreements with cities and counties across the country. These agreements are more than signatures on a piece of paper. They signify that in town halls and voting booths, 9-1-1 systems and emergency preparedness programs, and parks and convention centers, people with disabilities are able to more fully participate in everyday activities.

Joining us today are representatives from eight communities who will be signing agreements: Miami, Florida; Memphis, Tennessee; Birmingham, Alabama; Tucson, Arizona; Allen County, Indiana; Will County, Illinois; Monroe County, New York; and Prince George's County, Maryland: I salute them for their commitment to improving their communities for all citizens, including citizens with disabilities.

Fourteen other communities, who are not here with us, will also be signing agreements today. They are Crittenden County, Arkansas; Hartford, Connecticut; Ada County, Idaho; Gary, Indiana; Washington County, Maine; St. Louis County, Minnesota; Omaha, Nebraska; Paterson, New Jersey; Providence, Rhode Island; Laurens County, South Carolina; Madison County, Tennessee; Amarillo, Texas; Webb County, Texas; and Loudoun County, Virginia;

In addition, during the past year we have reached agreements in 13 other areas. They are Sedona, Arizona; Carpinteria and San Luis Obispo, California; Lafayette County, Florida; Hutchinson, Kansas; Missoula County, Montana; Cheshire County, New Hampshire; Gallup, New Mexico; Monroe County, Pennsylvania; Bend, Oregon; Florence County, South Carolina; Washington County, Utah; and Suffolk, Virginia.

While these cities and counties are taking their first steps toward more accessible communities, another city is honored today for completing its Project Civic Access agreement -- Dodge City, Kansas. Once again, my home state of Kansas is at the forefront. I want to recognize the two City employees who led Dodge City's efforts - Ms. Cherise Tieben ("Tee - Ben"), Human Resources Director and ADA Coordinator, and Mr. Kurt Nietling ("Neat - Ling"), former Construction Coordinator and now Director of Parks.

Mr. Kurt Nietling is responsible for much of the “hands on” work required under the agreement. The quality of his workmanship on modifications to ramps, walkways, and restrooms stood out for its precision. Mr. Nietling modestly explained that Dodge City takes the ADA seriously and understands how small differences in the slopes of ramps or the width of doorways make a big difference to the individuals relying on them.

In her role as ADA Coordinator, Ms. Cherise Tieben guided the implementation of the settlement agreement, and met all deadlines with comprehensive monitoring reports. Ms. Tieben’s attention to detail greatly aided our review of the City’s progress.

These dedicated public employees helped the Department and the City to achieve a successful resolution and are recognized today for their superlative compliance efforts. Ms. Tieben and Mr. Nietling, please come forward to accept these plaques as a token of our appreciation, and, if you would like, to say a few words.

[presentation of plaques, opportunity for Ms. Tieben to speak; Mr. Nietling has expressed his preference for NOT speaking]

Thank you so much Ms. Tieben for your remarks and for the efforts that you and Mr. Nietling have made to make Project Civic Access a great success in Dodge City.

This is just one example of the progress that Project Civic Access is bringing to communities across America. After today's ceremony we will have signed a total of 135 PCA agreements. Each change agreed to represents a vital step in achieving a new freedom for people with disabilities and the opportunity to enjoy civic life on the same basis as everyone else. Many of these fixes are very simple, some are daunting. But the changes taking place have something in common. That commonality is the vision and heart of people like those here today, who are doing their part to achieve the President's goal of an America where there are no insignificant lives and where everyone belongs.