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 Paralyzed Veterans of America

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

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July 26, 2013, marked the 23rd anniversary of the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#), a good time to reflect not only on the positive changes brought about by the law but also on the work that remains to be done to fully assist and accommodate people with disabilities.



"The ADA has been around for 23 years, and it's done amazing things in that time period," said Lee Page, associate [advocacy](#) director at Paralyzed Veterans of America. "It's mainstreamed people with disabilities into all aspects of society, but there's still ongoing issues that always need to be addressed."

[Paralyzed Veterans](#) helped lead the charge for passage of the act in 1990 and has since fought against efforts to weaken it. Since its enactment, the ADA has been influential in fighting discrimination in areas of employment, public services, public accommodations, transportation and telecommunications for individuals with disabilities.

As part of this year's anniversary, Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, and chief sponsor of the ADA in 1990, released a report that identified shortfalls for many states in implementing the Supreme Court's 1999 decision in *Olmstead v. L.C.*, which ruled that the ADA requires individuals with disabilities be integrated into the community rather than forced into nursing homes and other institutions. By 2010, only 12 states had made acceptable progress in implementing *Olmstead*, the report found.

Meanwhile, Paralyzed Veterans continues to advocate for [accessibility](#) in areas that are still lacking since the ADA was enacted, including making transportation as well as emergency response plans and local shelters more accommodating to individuals with disabilities, said Maureen McCloskey, national advocacy program director at Paralyzed Veterans.

"Emergency escape plans are covered by the ADA, and [the Federal Emergency Management Agency] has done a lot of work on this since Hurricane Katrina," McCloskey said. "A lot of this is going to happen at the local level to ensure that shelters are accessible and accept service animals."

Paralyzed Veterans also has been working to remove barriers identified by disabled voters in the 2012 presidential election. Many disabled voters, for example, were forced to stand in long lines, while at other polling stations, [accessible voting](#) machines were not running, Page said. Paralyzed Veterans has been assisting government officials in efforts to evaluate the electoral process and ensure compliance not only with the ADA but also with the 2002 Help America Vote Act, Page added.

"Our members are members of the armed services who go overseas to promote democracy in foreign lands," Page said. "If our democracy is not transparent and 100 percent accessible, then that's a problem that needs to be rectified."

[Learn more about Paralyzed Veterans of America's advocacy for all people with disabilities](#)

Brittany Ballenstedt is a freelance journalist whose work has appeared in several publications, including Government Executive, National Journal, Technology Daily and NextGov.com.

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