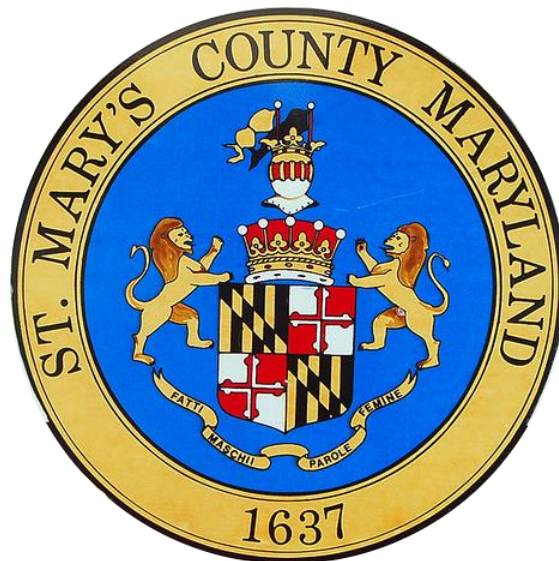


St. Mary's County  
Commission on People with Disabilities  
2020 Annual Report



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## **History**

The St. Mary's County Commission for the Disabled was established on April 16, 1991 by the Board of County Commissioners for St. Mary's County, Maryland through the adoption of resolution 91-11 and codified as chapter 156 of the code of St. Mary's County, Maryland.

On January 29, 2002, the Board of County Commissioners for St. Mary's County, Maryland renamed the commission to the Commission on People with Disabilities and revised the membership.

On January 26, 2010, The Board of County Commissioners for St. Mary's County, Maryland adopted by-laws for the commission and increased its membership.

On June 21, 2011 the Board of County Commissioners for St. Mary's County, Maryland restated the establishment of the Commission on People with Disabilities and increased citizen membership.

Currently the Commission meets the third Thursday of every month at 4 p.m. in room 14 of the Potomac Building. The Department of Human Resources provides staff support.

## **ADA Overview**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became law in 1990. The ADA is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including employment, education, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public.

The purpose of the law is to make sure that people with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. The ADA is divided into five titles or sections that relate to different areas of public life.

### **Title I-Employment**

- Designed to help people with disabilities access the same employment opportunities and benefits as people without disabilities.
- Applies to employers with 15 or more employees
- Requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations to qualified applicants or employees. A “reasonable accommodation” is a change made that accommodates employees with disabilities without causing the employer any “undue hardship”.
- Defines disability, establishes guidelines for the reasonable accommodation process, addresses medical examination requirements and inquiries, and defines “direct threat” when there is a risk of substantial harm to the health and safety of the employee with a disability or others.

### **Title II-Public Services: State and Local Government**

- Prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability by “public entities” such as programs, services, and activities operated by state and local governments.
- Requires public entities to make their programs, services, and activities accessible to individuals with disabilities.
- Outlines requirements for self-evaluation and planning: making reasonable modifications to policies, practices, and procedures, where necessary to avoid discrimination; identifying architectural barriers; and communicating effectively with people with hearing, vision, and speech disabilities.

### **Title III-Public accommodations and services provided by public entities**

- Prohibits places of public accommodation from discriminating against individuals with disabilities. Public accommodations include privately-owned, leased or operated facilities, such as hotels, restaurants, retail merchants, golf courses, doctor's offices, schools, day cares, health clubs, sports stadiums, movie theaters, etc.
- Sets minimum standards for accessibility for alterations and new construction. It also requires public accommodations to remove barriers in existing buildings where it is easy to do so without difficulty or much expense.
- Directs businesses to make "reasonable modifications" to their usual ways of doing business when serving people with disabilities.
- Requires that business to take the necessary steps to communicate effectively with customers with hearing, vision, and speech disabilities.

### **Title IV-Telecommunications**

- Requires telephone and internet companies to provide a nationwide system of interstate and intrastate telecommunication relay services that allows individuals with hearing and speech disabilities to communicate over the telephone.
- Requires closed captioning of federally funded public service announcements.

### **Title V-Miscellaneous provisions**

- Contains a variety of provisions relating to the ADA as a whole, including its relationship to other laws, state immunity, its impact on insurance providers and benefits, prohibition against retaliation and coercion, illegal use of drugs, and attorney's fees.
- Provides a list of certain conditions that are not to be considered as disabilities.

## **Introduction**

Formed by the Commissioners of St. Mary's County in response to the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the St. Mary's County Commission on People with Disabilities (COPD) exists to increase acceptance, awareness, and full participation in all aspects of county life, including the quality of life for persons with disabilities. Additionally, the COPD has the responsibility of providing advice to the Commissioners of St. Mary's County and to improve awareness and inclusion of people with disabilities.

## **Public Events and Accomplishments 2020**

The year 2020 was marked by the global COVID-19 Pandemic which affected the lives of St. Mary's County residents as well as the normal operations of the Commission. Two meetings were canceled, and several others were conducted only via conference call. Towards the end of the year, the Commission members were able to meet in-person following social distancing guidelines and room capacity limits. Besides these challenges, the Commission on People with Disabilities was able to work on some of the continuing Goals from the previous year.

- Increase membership
  - The COPD did not significantly increase membership in 2020. Monthly meeting attendance was consistent and facilitated via teleconference for most of the year.
- Public Awareness
  - In 2020 commission members attended several virtual meetings hosted by the Chamber of Commerce to continue the relationship developed with the Chamber throughout the previous year. Unfortunately, the Commission was not able to host a Business After Hours event due to the uncertainty of the reopening and changing guidelines during the Pandemic.
  - The commission increased online presence via Facebook in order to reach residents in the absence of in-person public awareness activities and ensure access to resources and information to support the most vulnerable in our community.
  - Annual Holiday Party- the 2020 annual holiday party was canceled due to social distancing guidelines, concerns for the safety of our participants, and continued closure of the venue for the event, the Loffler Senior Center.
- Provide support to the ADA coordinator for St. Mary's County.
  - The commission members continued to assist the ADA coordinator in her position for part of the year and supported the County Administrative Staff temporarily fulfilling the responsibilities of ADA coordinator for the rest of the year.
- Appreciation
  - Each year the Commission on People with Disabilities and community partners conduct an awards ceremony to celebrate those in

our community that have demonstrated excellence in supporting individuals with disabilities. Due to the challenges the COVID-19 Pandemic created during 2020, the Commission was not able to plan or conduct the 2020 Award Ceremony.

### **Goals for 2021**

- Increase membership and member participation
- Resume Public Awareness activities
- Provide support to the ADA coordinator for St. Mary's County.
- Appreciation/ Annual Award Ceremony



## **Conclusion**

2020 was a challenging year due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Commission's inability to meet in person or participate in awareness events and activities. Most of the meetings were conducted via teleconference. The members had to shift their focus to reaching residents in a virtual environment and supporting the immediate needs of the community affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic. We look forward to bringing back into focus our purpose, increased awareness, fair treatment, and inclusion for people with disabilities over the coming years. Thank you to the Commissioners of St. Mary's County for your continued support of the Commission on People with Disabilities. Thank you to the Department of Human Resources for your support in staffing and training. A very special thank you to each and every member of the Commission on People with Disabilities for your efforts as a member of the Commission and your efforts in our community and thank you to all the organizations and people who have dedicated their lives and careers to helping others. Our hope is that during 2021 our activities will return to normal, and the Commission will increase awareness and inclusion of people with disabilities.