

How can insights from U.S. accommodations for people with disabilities inform and shape improvements to accessibility within Canada's justice system?

Exploring how U.S. court models can inform equitable access for self-represented litigants with disabilities in Canada
by Lauren Howorth



43% of Self-Represented Litigants (SRLs) identified as having a disability in 2021-2023.



For more information & stats on SRLs, scan here:



Canada vs. U.S. Disability Policy

In the U.S., the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a strong, enforceable civil rights law that requires courts to provide clear, proactive accommodations. In Canada, accessibility policies vary by province and often rely more on individual requests and general principles of equality under the Charter. The U.S. model offers more consistency and accountability, while Canada's system can be slower and harder to navigate—especially for self-represented litigants.



“To me, legal rights are an unfulfilled promise.” - Person with disability, Toronto (CBA, 2013)

Case Study: Accessibility in Illinois

Illinois offers a leading example of how courts can provide meaningful accommodations for people with disabilities. Every court in the state is required to have an ADA coordinator who responds to requests and ensures accessibility compliance. These coordinators receive centralized training and support through the Illinois Attorney General's Disability Rights Bureau—one of the only dedicated disability bureaus in the United States. In 2023, a unified court accessibility policy was implemented statewide, creating consistent standards across all courts under the authority of the Illinois Supreme Court.

Recommendations for Canada

- ◆ Mandatory ADA coordinators in every court with direct access to legal and technical guidance
- ◆ A nationwide accessibility policy that applies to all courts regardless of location or size
- ◆ Ongoing accessibility training for all judges, beginning at new judge orientation
- ◆ Personal liability for judges who intentionally fail to implement approved accommodations
- ◆ Programmatic access: if a courtroom is inaccessible, the hearing must be moved to an accessible location

Courts must tailor accommodations to the individual because every disability is different.
Some examples of possible accommodations: →




Scheduled breaks to help manage stress or processing delays


Remote hearings for those with mobility challenges


Service animals in court


Real-time captioning (CART) and access to transcripts free of charge