

ADA Rights and Grievance Procedure

For Individuals Interacting with a 911 Emergency Communications Center

Every person has the right to equal access to emergency services. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), 911 centers—also known as Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs)—must ensure that individuals with disabilities can access emergency communication services in a manner that is as effective as communication provided to others.

Emergency response is critical to public service. Accessibility is not optional—it is a civil right.

Your Rights When Contacting 911

Under Title II of the ADA (which applies to state and local government entities), a 911 center must:

- Provide direct and equal access to individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have speech disabilities
- Accept and respond to TTY calls
- Provide access to Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS)
- Ensure effective communication through appropriate auxiliary aids and services
- Avoid discrimination based on disability in the provision of emergency services

This includes maintaining properly functioning TTY equipment, training call-takers to recognize and handle relay calls and ensuring policies do not screen out or disadvantage individuals with disabilities.

Oversight and enforcement of ADA compliance for public entities, including 911 centers operated by state or local governments, falls under the U.S. Department of Justice.

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Important Disclaimer

This information is provided to explain your rights under the ADA as they relate to access to 911 services.

- Filing a grievance does **not** replace calling 911 in an emergency.
- If you are experiencing a life-threatening emergency, always call 911 (or use available text-to-911 or relay services where supported).
- Grievances address concerns about accessibility or discrimination and are reviewed after the emergency situation has concluded.

The grievance process is not intended to evaluate operational decisions made during emergency response (such as dispatch prioritization or field response times) unless those decisions involved disability-based discrimination or failure to provide required accommodations.

Examples of ADA Concerns in a 911 Setting

You may consider filing a grievance if you experienced:

- Failure to answer or properly respond to a TTY or relay call
- Refusal to accept a relay service call
- Inaccessible text-to-911 services where publicly advertised
- Lack of effective communication accommodations

- Discriminatory treatment because of a disability
- Harassment or inappropriate remarks related to disability

Not every negative experience constitutes ADA discrimination. However, concerns involving accessibility barriers or unequal treatment should be reviewed.

ADA Grievance Procedure for 911 Center Non-Compliance

If you believe the 911 center failed to comply with the ADA, the following steps may help guide you:

Step 1: Document the Incident

As soon as possible, record:

- Date and time of the call
- Method used (voice, TTY, relay, text-to-911)
- A description of what occurred
- Names or identifying information of personnel, if known
- Any confirmation numbers, recordings, or related documents

Accurate documentation supports a thorough review.

Step 2: Submit a Written ADA Grievance to the 911 Center

Many 911 centers designate an ADA Coordinator or administrative office to receive complaints.

Your written grievance should include:

- Your name and contact information
- A clear description of the incident
- How you believe ADA protections were not met
- Any supporting documentation
- The resolution you are seeking

The grievance should typically be submitted within 30–60 days of the incident, when possible. The center should acknowledge receipt and conduct an impartial review.

The review process may include:

- Examination of call recordings or logs
- Interviews with involved personnel
- Evaluation of policies, procedures, and training
- A written response outlining findings and any corrective actions

Step 3: Appeal (If Applicable)

If you disagree with the outcome, you may request an appeal through the center’s administrative structure, such as the communications director, county administrator, or governing authority overseeing the PSAP.

Step 4: File an External Complaint

If you believe the matter was not resolved appropriately, you may file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division.

The DOJ reviews complaints involving public entities and may:

- Conduct an investigation
 - Facilitate voluntary compliance agreements
 - Initiate enforcement action if necessary
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Protection from Retaliation

The ADA prohibits retaliation against any individual who files a grievance, requests accommodation, or participates in an investigation. Individuals raising accessibility concerns must not face adverse treatment as a result.

Commitment to Equal Emergency Access

911 centers exist to serve the entire community—including individuals with disabilities. Equal access to emergency communication is not simply a regulatory requirement; it is fundamental to public safety.

If you believe accessibility barriers affected your ability to receive emergency services, using the grievance process helps improve systems, strengthen compliance, and protect the rights of others in the future.

Accessible emergency services save lives. Equal access ensures that every call for help is heard.

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