



NH Governor's Commission on Disability

ADA30 Transcript

[Audio](#) 

Lorrie Ripley Reflects on Her Introduction to the ADA, the ADA's Evolving Importance in Employment Issues, Mental Health and More

In reflecting on the 30th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), I tried to recall the context of the times. Where was I on July 26, 1990? Turns out that day was a Monday, so I was likely at work which was at the US Census. The Americans with Disabilities Act was not even a blip on my radar. I will admit, I was not a news watcher yet but still, I recall nothing from the momentous occasion it was then. Since that time, of course, I have come to know about and embrace the ADA.

My deepest dive into the ADA began when I first applied for my position as the Client Assistance program (CAP) Ombudsman at the Governor's Commission on Disability. One of the primary mandates of the CAP is to advise and inform people with disabilities of all services and benefits available to them under Title I (Employment) of the ADA. I found I had a lot of catching up to do and I studied feverishly. I was thrilled to get the job! I would say my true education on the ADA began at that point and continues every day.

While I focus primarily on employment and issues of workplace accommodation, the application of the ADA often crosses two or more of the areas of concern, making the issue at hand more complex. At the GCD, we often round table these concerns to provide comprehensive guidance to our callers. Guidance and interpretation are juxtaposed against the backdrop of the real world at any given time and so the application must be thoughtful and considered. In 1990, mental illness and substance use issues were still not widely thought of as disabilities.

However, today, we have specific guidance that discusses potential accommodations or support the employee might need and reasonably expect from an employer. Combined with initiatives such as Recovery Friendly Workplaces, everybody wins – employer and employee.

The interpretation of the ADA and all its Titles will continue to expand and evolve into the future as society expands and evolves as well. Work may look vastly different in the future as telework and social distancing have become more the new normal. We can approach it all armed with this powerful civil rights law and the knowledge that we can all move the ADA forward and into the future!

Happy 30th Anniversary ADA!

End of transcript. July 2020. *Lorrie Ripley, MS, LCMHC is the Client Assistance Program (CAP) Ombudsman, and works under the GCD. She is substantially involved with STABLE NH and the STABLE NH Council.*