

Independent Perspective #1895 with Todd Vaarwerk on the ADA

Transcript

00:00:00 Speaker 1

Welcome to Independent Perspective, a public affairs presentation of Western New York Independent Living.

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July 26, 1990 marked a significant day in disability history.

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On that day, then President George H.W.

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Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act into law.

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This law prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life.

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Joining us today to talk about the history and significance

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of the ADA is Western New York Independent Living's Chief Policy Officer, Todd Vaarwerk.

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Welcome to the program, Todd.

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Always a pleasure.

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We're glad to have you.

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Let's start with a brief overview on the Americans with Disabilities Act.

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What is the significance of this legislation and why was it so important?

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I always like the fact when you answer your own question, Ernie, I think the introduction does a really good idea of talking about, you know, what the importance of the ADA is.

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It's a law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in a lot of areas of public life.

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It's important because prior to that, we only had program protection based on the spending of federal dollars.

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And, we still have that under the Rehabilitation Act in 1973.

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But the ADA kind of

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went into those areas of private business and other things that weren't necessarily being touched by the federal dollars for the first time.

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The ADA consists of titles one through five.

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What specific areas do each of those titles cover?

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That's very important, always a good thing to know.

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Title I is employment, which protects you in getting and keeping a job.

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Title II are public entities, and this refers to states and local governments

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making them do the same thing that the federal governments had to do since the 80s.

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Title III are places of public accommodation.

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That's where all the private business is done.

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You know, dry cleaners, supermarkets, gas stations, movie theaters, schools, right?

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The accessibility and all of those are in Title III.

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Title IV is communications, making sure that there's

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clear ways to communicate for people that are blind and deaf.

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And Title V is what they refer to as the miscellaneous provisions title, 'cause every major law has them.

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And I normally highlight Title V because that's where paratransit resides.

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Paratransit is the curb-to-curb service for people with disabilities who, because of their disability, can't take fixed route public transit.

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As we mentioned, the legislation was passed in 1990, so a lot has changed in the world since then.

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Are there any areas of public life where a renewed focus might be needed to ensure equal rights for people with disabilities?

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Certainly.

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In the 35 years since we passed the ADA, technology has jumped and loomed to be much larger in life.

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But we really don't have any ADA-based federal standards in terms of making sure that that technology is accessible for people with disabilities.

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There is federal protection.

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There is Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that talks about some technology.

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But even then, it's kind of being outstripped when we're looking at things like AI and all the other things that are coming out of technology.

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As a reminder to the viewers, ADA doesn't necessarily cover housing, except in very specific circumstances, like the ability to reach the manager's office so that you can have him show you an apartment.

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For that, you need the Fair Housing Act or the Fair Housing Amendments Act.

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What resources would you recommend to someone who's interested in more information on the ADA or how to become involved in advocacy efforts?

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So straight up information on the ADA, I refer you to the preeminent government

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reference for ADA information, ada.gov.

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It's a government website run by the feds, has all of the information you could need about looking up a particular thing about the ADA.

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However, if you need a bit more help or if you want to be involved in advocacy on making things more accessible, that's when you call here at the Independent Living Center.

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For an individual issue, like if you're having a problem on the job or having a problem determining if something's accessible, you absolutely pick up the phone and call us, 716-836-0822.

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and speaks to our intake department at extension 126.

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But if you're looking to advocate for stuff, then you call me, 716-836-0822, extension 101, or e-mail me at tvaarwerk@wnyil.org

00:04:44 Speaker 1

Thanks so much for being with us, Todd.

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Always a pleasure.

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You've been listening to Independent Perspective, a public affairs presentation of Western New York Independent Living.

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Our guest today was Western New York Independent Living's Chief Policy Officer, Todd Vaarwerk

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and I've been your host Ernie Churchwell.