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JUSTICE DEPARTMENT SIGNS AGREEMENT TO ENSURE CIVIC ACCESS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN MARYLAND

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WASHINGTON - The Justice Department today announced an agreement with Montgomery County, Md., and Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission (MNCPPC), to improve access to all aspects of civic life for persons with disabilities. The agreement was reached under Project Civic Access (PCA), the department's wide-ranging initiative to ensure that cities, towns and counties throughout the country comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

"Access to public programs and facilities is a civil right, and individuals with disabilities must have the opportunity to participate in local government programs, services and activities on an equal basis with their neighbors," said Roy L. Austin Jr., Deputy Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. "Montgomery County has made significant progress towards achieving ADA compliance, and this agreement sets out a realistic plan for the county to accomplish its goal. Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission officials will be evaluating all of its parks for ADA compliance. I commend county and park officials for working with the Justice Department to provide equal access to all of its programs, services, and activities."

As part of the PCA initiative, Justice Department investigators, attorneys and architects survey state and local government facilities, services and programs in communities across the country to identify the modifications needed for compliance with ADA requirements. Based on these surveys, agreements are tailored to address the steps each community must take to improve access. This agreement is the 194th under the PCA initiative.

Under the agreement announced today, Montgomery County and MNCPPC will take important steps to improve access to county programs for individuals with disabilities, such as:

- Making physical modifications to facilities surveyed by the department so that parking, routes to buildings, entrances, service areas and counters, restrooms, public telephones and drinking fountains are accessible to persons with disabilities;
- Implementing plans to survey all other county and MNCPPC facilities and programs and to make modifications wherever necessary to achieve full compliance with the ADA;
- Providing effective communication;
- Ensuring that county programs for victims of domestic violence and abuse are accessible to persons with disabilities;
- Posting, publishing and distributing a notice to inform members of the public of the provisions of Title II and their applicability to the county's programs, services and activities;

- Administering a grievance procedure for resolving complaints of violations of Title II of the ADA;
- Planning and preparing emergency management procedures to include individuals with disabilities, including emergency preparedness, notification, evacuation, sheltering, response, clean up and recovery, and making modifications to ensure equal and integrated access;
- Ensuring that the county's official website and other web-based services are accessible to people with disabilities; and
- Implementing a comprehensive plan to improve the accessibility of the county's sidewalks and pedestrian crossings by installing accessible curb ramps throughout Montgomery County.

Montgomery County was founded in 1776. Rolling land and small hills make up most of the county's 497 square miles, with 15 square miles of water, including rivers, streams, lakes and reservoirs and 28,435 acres of parkland. Montgomery County is now the most populous county in the state of Maryland. According to census data, more than 107,000 Montgomery County residents have a disability. MNCPPC operates more than 53,000 acres of parkland, offering a variety of facilities, recreation and sporting fields. Their facilities include nature centers, conference centers and community centers. Historic sites, recreation buildings and group picnic areas are also found on the parkland.

Today's agreement was reached under Title II of the ADA, which prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities by state and local governments. The agreement will remain in effect for six years from Aug. 16, 2011. The department will actively monitor compliance with the agreement until all required actions have been completed.

For more information on the PCA initiative or the ADA Best Practices Tool Kit for State and Local Governments, please visit the ADA website at www.ada.gov or call the toll-free ADA Information Line at 800-514-0301 or 800-514-0383 (TTY). People interested in finding out more about today's agreement with Montgomery County and MNCPPC, please visit www.ada.gov/montgomery_co_pca/montgomery_co_sa.htm.