



Connecticut Judicial Branch Guidelines for Use of a Support Person in Proceedings

The Connecticut Judicial Branch complies with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (the Act) and accommodates individuals with disabilities by providing equal access to its services, programs, and activities. As such, the Branch makes reasonable modifications to its services, programs and activities for people with visible and invisible disabilities. The Judicial Branch may allow a support person to sit next to a litigant with disabilities when he or she appears for matters before the court. Support persons serve as a calming influence for people with hidden disabilities in proceedings, including not only courtroom appearances but also matters that are usually closed to the public, such as mediation sessions or Family Relations conferences, or to proceedings which involve the use of confidential information, such as jury selection. In order to ensure uniformity of services and in the spirit of the Act, the following guidelines regarding support persons are adopted.

1. Who can be a support person:

- A trusted friend
- A person who is there for you, without their own personal agenda
- A friend or family member who does not have a past or present conflict with anyone involved in your case
- A person who can remain calm and focused
- No special certification is required
- You do not need to pay for a support person

2. Who may not be a support person:

- A party to the case
- A witness in the hearing or trial
- A minor
- An attorney, provided you disclose that fact in advance and the request is approved

3. What a support person may do:

A support person may help a litigant in the following ways:

- Provide emotional and moral support
- Take notes
- Help organize and hand you documents
- Observe the courtroom proceedings, including mediation sessions or conferences
- Perform any other task as requested by the judicial authority to help a litigant with disabilities during proceedings

4. What a support person may not do:

A support person is not allowed to do the following:

- Give legal advice
- Address the court
- Participate in mediation sessions or conferences
- Examine witnesses
- Cause disruption or interfere with the judicial authority or court personnel. If a support person interferes with the judicial authority or court personnel, the proceedings, or the parties, the authority may require the support person to be removed.

Important reminders for a support person:

- A litigant should ask for and be granted an ADA accommodation for a support person prior to the start of any proceeding.
- A support person must be physically present in the courtroom.
- While a litigant with a disability may have various people willing to serve in a support person role, only one support person may serve in that role during proceedings.
- The availability of a support person plays no role in scheduling court events. If a preferred support person is not available for a particular court date, the litigant with the disability may want to find an alternative support person.
- A support person does not represent you; he or she gives you moral or emotional support.
- A support person does not participate in any proceedings, mediation sessions or conferences; he or she gives you moral or emotional support.

- A support person must introduce themselves by name and on the record to the court.
- A support person may be allowed to attend a mediation session, conference or proceeding that is closed to the public or that involves access to confidential information, but only if given prior approval and only if the support person signs a Confidentiality Agreement. A Confidentiality Agreement can be obtained from the ADA Contact or centralized ADA office.
- A support person may be removed from the courtroom or other court office if he or she is disruptive, interferes with the proceedings, violates safety rules, or fundamentally alters the nature of the proceedings.