



35 YEARS LATER

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

Why the ADA Still Matters (And Always Will)

By Carlos Ramalho, LIFTT's Executive Director

Let's be honest: not every law changes lives. But the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)?

That one *did* — and still *does*. And this July, as we mark its 35th anniversary, LIFTT is not just celebrating history. LIFTT is defending the future.

The ADA Isn't Just a Law — It's a Line in the Sand

Passed in 1990, the ADA wasn't some feel-good gesture. It was a radical statement. It said:

**People with disabilities are not invisible.
Not second-class.
Not optional.**

It forced elevators into buildings. Ramps into schools. Captions into videos. Jobs into hands that were always ready to work.

But more than that? The ADA *forced* a shift in thinking — from exclusion to equity. From charity to civil rights.

And let's be clear: civil rights don't expire. They don't bend to budget cuts. They don't "age out" at 35.

**Fragile? Never.
Permanent? Only If We Protect It.**

Some might say, "Things are better now. What's the fuss?" But better isn't the same as equal. And equal isn't the same as safe. Here's the uncomfortable truth:

**Progress can be reversed. Rights can be weakened.
Protections can be chipped away — not always with a
bulldozer, but with a quiet, cruel scalpel.**

A funding cut here. A rollback there. A shrug when accessibility is treated as "too expensive." We can't let that happen.

This Isn't Nostalgia — It's a Call to Action

Laws like the ADA are like bridges. They connect people to opportunity, independence, and dignity. But bridges need maintenance. Attention. Constant defense.

This July, as we honor 35 years of the ADA, let's ask ourselves:

1. Are we doing enough to protect and expand its legacy?
2. Are we watching for the slow erosion of rights wrapped in bureaucracy?
3. Are we educating the next generation on why this law matters—not just for people with disabilities, but for **all of us**?

Because when we uphold the ADA, we affirm something deeper:
That our country is strongest when it guarantees space, voice, and visibility for everyone.

That accessibility isn't "extra"—it's essential.

That justice doesn't whisper — it ramps up.

The ADA Is Us

The ADA is not just policy.
It's every sidewalk cutout. Every interpreter on screen. Every job accommodation. Every vote cast with an accessible ballot.
The ADA is the architecture of equality.

And that makes it personal. For all of us.

So, happy anniversary to the law that reminded us that we belong.

Let's celebrate — not with silence or apathy, but with vigilance, pride, and purpose.

Let's keep walking through every door the ADA opened — and build new ones, too.

Want to get involved?

Join LIFTT this month for events, reflections, and action opportunities. Because honoring the ADA means more than looking back.

Attend the celebration of the ADA 35th Anniversary on July 26, 2025, from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM, at 1241 Crawford Drive, Billings, MT 59102.

It means moving forward — together.

For questions or to learn more, contact us at (406) 259-5181 or visit LIFTT's website www.liftt.org

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LIFTT is a Montana 501(c)(3) nonprofit Center for Independent Living (CIL) with offices in Billings and Glendive, providing services to aging and disabled individuals in 18 counties across South and Central Eastern Montana: Big Horn, Carbon, Carter, Custer, Dawson, Fallon, Garfield, Golden Valley, McCone, Musselshell, Powder River, Prairie, Richland, Rosebud, Stillwater, Treasure, Wibaux, and Yellowstone.

Our Vision: Empowering aging and disabled individuals to LIFTT themselves above the barriers of life.

Our Mission: Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow – LIFTT's mission is to empower aging and disabled individuals to live independently through education, support, and opportunities.