



The City of New York Office of Chief Medical Examiner

Local Law 12 Five-Year Accessibility Plan (2024 – 2028)

September 5, 2024

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Local Law 12 of 2023 Five-Year Accessibility Plan

General

Local Law 12 of 2023 (Local Law 12), codified as NYC Administrative Code §23-1004 of the NYC Administrative Code, requires all City agencies to prepare, publish and implement a five-year accessibility plan, in consultation with the Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD).

This legislation mandates that the accessibility plans include the steps the agency has taken, is currently taking, and will be taking over the next five years to ensure that the agency’s workplace, services, programs, and activities are accessible to and accommodating and inclusive of persons with disabilities, through improvements to physical, digital, and programmatic access as well as the agency’s communications.

Statement of Commitment

The Office of Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) is committed to the inclusion of people with disabilities in its workplace, services, programs, and activities and will work to identify and remove barriers including, physical, communication, attitudinal, technological, and systemic, that hamper the full and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities. OCME’s Accessibility Plan outlines our strategy to ensure inclusion over the next five years through accessibility and to otherwise meet the requirements of all applicable laws, including the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the New York State Human Rights Law, and the New York City Human Rights Law.

OCME’s Accessibility Plan is publicly posted at:

<https://www.nyc.gov/site/ocme/about/accessibility-policy.page>

To request a copy of this document in an alternative accessible format contact OCME’s Disability Service Facilitator at Rvanpelt@ocme.nyc.gov or 212-323-1766.

OCME welcomed and encouraged feedback as we worked to finalize our accessibility plan and this plan includes consideration of all comments. You can comment on our plan by:

- **Email:**
You can email comments to Rvanpelt@ocme.nyc.gov
Please include “Accessibility Plan” in the subject line.

- **Website:**
You may submit comments via the Agency Accessibility Plan website at <https://accessibilityplans.cityofnewyork.us/>
- **Mail:**
You can mail comments to:
Robert D. Van Pelt
Disability Service Facilitator
Office of Chief Medical Examiner
421 East 26th Street
10th Floor, Room 1021
New York, New York 10016

OCME's Policy Prohibiting Disability Discrimination in Access to Services outlines our commitment to accessibility and inclusion in the operation of our programs, services and activities and can be found at <https://www.nyc.gov/site/ocme/about/accessibility-policy.page>

Further, OCME has instituted a Grievance Procedure for anyone who believes they may have been denied an auxiliary aid or service or a reasonable modification of policies or procedures necessary for their participation in OCME programs, services, or activities. OCME's Grievance procedure is explained at <https://www.nyc.gov/site/ocme/about/accessibility-policy.page>

Note: OCME's Policy and Grievance Procedure are also attached as Exhibits A and B.

In addition, OCME has designated EEO Officer Robert D. Van Pelt to serve as the agency's Disability Service Facilitator (DSF) and, together with OCME's Disability Services Facilitation Committee, the DSF is responsible for preparing and updating OCME's Accessibility Plan.

The DSF is OCME's the primary Agency contact for people with disabilities and is responsible to respond to requests for auxiliary services, develop and review agency policies and procedures to ensure programmatic and communication accessibility, and investigate any complaint alleging OCME's noncompliance with required accessibility.

OCME's Disability Service Facilitator can be contacted at:

Robert D. Van Pelt
Disability Service Facilitator
Office of Chief Medical Examiner
421 East 26th Street
10th Floor, Room 1021

New York, New York 10016
Email: Rvanpelt@ocme.nyc.gov

Mission and Background of Agency

Established in 1918, the New York City Office of Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) serves public health and the criminal justice system through forensic science. OCME's impartial investigations of deaths and analysis of evidence provide answers to families and communities during times of profound need.

OCME is responsible for investigating deaths that result from criminal violence, accident, or suicide; that occur suddenly and when in apparent good health; when unattended by a physician; in a correctional facility or in custody of any criminal justice entity; or occurring in any suspicious or unusual manner or threat to public health. These types of cases are referred to as being under "Medical Examiner jurisdiction." OCME provides forensic services to support investigations through its DNA crime, forensic toxicology, and molecular genetics laboratories.

OCME manages the City's Mortuary, including the retrieval and processing of unclaimed deceased persons and the facilitation of final disposition. OCME also reviews all applications for cremation. Finally, OCME maintains a specialized mass fatality management team ready to support the City's response to mass fatalities and other disasters.

Forensic Pathology

Forensic pathology is the branch of medicine concerned with the investigation of sudden and unnatural deaths. Death investigations are conducted by medical examiners, who are physicians with highly specialized training in forensic pathology.

Medical examiners draw on the full resources of OCME and its professionals, including medicolegal investigators, laboratories, and forensic anthropologists, among others, to determine the cause and manner of death. Medical examiners complete timely and independent investigations to provide answers for families, protect public health, and inform the criminal justice system.

OCME is home to the nation's largest forensic pathology fellowship program, and is a leading center for training, education and research in forensic pathology and related disciplines. OCME experts hold appointments at the NYU School of Medicine Department of Forensic Medicine, which is chaired by the Chief Medical Examiner.

OCME Laboratories

The Division of Laboratories consists of five leading-edge laboratories that support the critical work of OCME's medical examiners in determining cause and manner of death and serve the criminal justice system in New York City.

Approximately 225 scientists and support staff work in the Division of Laboratories. The Division includes the Forensic Biology, Forensic Toxicology, Histology, Molecular Genetics, and Anthropology Laboratories. Each laboratory supports the mission of OCME by identifying individuals through their DNA (Forensic Biology), performing toxicological (Forensic Toxicology) and histological (Histology) analyses, searching for genetic diseases (Molecular Genetics), and identifying skeletal remains (Forensic Anthropology).

The Forensic Biology Laboratory also serves as the City's DNA laboratory – independently analyzing biological evidence from criminal cases submitted by the NYPD. The Forensic Toxicology Laboratory also examines criminal evidence submitted by the NYPD from drug-facilitated sexual assault cases and alcohol or drug-related driving impaired cases.

Forensic Anthropology is the study of the human skeleton in the medicolegal context. OCME maintains a staff of skilled Forensic Anthropologists who utilize their expertise of the human skeleton when responding to death scenes and analyzing skeletal remains in the laboratory. In many instances, the expertise of the Forensic Anthropologist may be an essential contribution to the identification of a deceased person and the Medical Examiner's determination of cause and manner of death.

Forensic Anthropologists work with Medicolegal Investigators at death scenes where badly decomposed, skeletonized, fragmentary, burned, or buried remains are discovered. Forensic Anthropologists work in the laboratory documenting and interpreting skeletal trauma, using skeletal indicators to estimate the biological profile of unknown individuals (age-at-death, ancestry, sex, stature), and distinguishing human versus nonhuman bone.

Forensic Anthropologists are also important members of OCME's mass fatality response team. Anthropological skills are critical for these types of scenarios to ensure that human remains, and associated evidence are accurately and thoroughly recovered and documented.

In addition, OCME's Forensic Anthropology team continues to work to identify World Trade Center victims and serves as the point of contact for World Trade Center families.

OCME Family Outreach Unit

OCME Family Outreach Unit is dedicated to conducting diligent searches to locate and notify next-of-kin to facilitate identification and the proper release of decedents for final disposition. OCME staff work closely with family and loved ones, medical practitioners, and other advisors to collect, analyze, and verify information necessary for the proper identification of the deceased so that families can make arrangements for final disposition. As most identifications are confirmed remotely it is not always necessary for family members to visit OCME's facilities in person. However, families may also receive

assistance at OCME's Family Services Centers, which are located in each of the five boroughs.

Emergency Management

OCME Emergency Management Division is an active participant in New York City's Disaster Response system, planning for and responding to disasters of all types. OCME's team of specially trained experts respond to any mass fatality event to facilitate victim recovery and identification and assist family members. The Division also manages the Unified Victim Identification System and the All-Hazards Response Team.

The outstanding team at OCME numbers more than 700 employees, and includes Medical Examiners, Medicolegal Investigators, Forensic Scientists, Evidence and Property Control Specialists, Forensic Anthropologists, Emergency Management Professionals, Mortuary Technicians, IT Professionals, Procurement Analysts, Accountants, Administrative Support Staff, and other dedicated professionals.

Executive Summary

The Office of Chief Medical Examiner is committed to providing people with disabilities equal opportunity and meaningful access to our resources, programs, services, and facilities. To ensure equity and accessibility OCME will continue to identify and remove any barriers to accessibility, including architectural and physical barriers, informational and communication barriers, attitudinal barriers, technological barriers, and systemic barriers. This accessibility plan is intended to assist in the identification of any barriers and in the development of agency policies and procedures that guarantee full accessibility.

OCME has formed a Disability Services Facilitation Committee. The Committee includes the Disability Services Facilitator as well as representatives from leadership and equal employment opportunity, legal, human resources, health and safety, finance, communications, facilities, and digital technology. This Committee will study OCME's policies, programs, activities, and services to assess the experiences of people with different disabilities as they learn about, apply for, and engage in OCME's programs, activities, and services. This examination will include all aspects of accessibility and whether effective communication is provided.

The Committee will also analyze whether members of the public can effectively request and receive reasonable accommodations and modifications of policies and procedures to allow participation in OCME's programs and to receive services.

Thereafter, OCME will develop updated policies and implement procedures suggested by the Committee's recommendations. Further, to ensure staff awareness of disability access issues, OCME will continue to educate and train agency staff. OCME will also monitor conformance to policies and use data to improve the effectiveness of

OCME's accessibility plan.

OCME will update this multi-year accessibility plan incorporating the findings of the Committee, the policies created, and the programs implemented.

Accessibility Statement

OCME is dedicated to ensuring an equitable, diverse, and inclusive environment for our workforce, our partners and all we serve. In accordance with all federal state and local anti-discrimination laws and regulations as well as all EEO policies of the City of New York, we provide equal employment opportunities for all employees and applicants by ensuring an environment free of discrimination and harassment regardless of protected categories and accommodating and inclusive of persons with disabilities.

This is accomplished through agency wide EEO, diversity and inclusion training, management engagement, ongoing self-evaluation, grievance procedures, accessibility planning, and the incorporation of the goals of diversity, equity, inclusion, equal employment opportunity into our recruitment efforts and sources, our selection (hiring and promotion) processes, our training opportunities, our response to reasonable accommodation requests as well as our workplace activities.

OCME is also dedicated to operating in a manner that is accessible to individuals with disabilities. OCME understands that to ensure individuals with disabilities have equal access to OCME's programs, services, and activities, it must remove barriers to accessibility. And to accomplish this task, OCME plans through self-evaluation to identify the various types of agency interactions that may present difficulties for persons with disabilities and then identify approaches that could remove or lower any barriers. Thereafter, OCME will make the necessary modifications and incorporate any accessibility requirements into its development and acquisition efforts.

OCME's Five-Year Accessibility Plan

Workplace Inclusion – Implementation 2024 through 2028

OCME is committed to fair and accessible employment practices which are inclusive of persons with disabilities. To this end, the Disability Facilitation Committee shall review and amend OCME's existing policies, practices and procedures as needed to make OCME's programs, services, and activities accessible for persons with disabilities. This evaluation may include:

- Conducting a comprehensive self-evaluation of all OCME's recruitment, pre-employment, selection, hiring and onboarding policies and processes to comply with principles and practices of accessibility.
- Ensuring that all information regarding requesting accommodation is included in all job postings and interview confirmation letters/emails sent to candidates.

- Providing all employment/personnel notices in accessible formats.
- Increasing our participation in disability inclusive recruitment events and job boards and the 55-a program.
- Expanding our collaboration with state vocational rehabilitation agencies and CUNY LEADS and Job Path.
- Reviewing OCME's performance management, career development and advancement policies and practices to ensure that accessibility needs of employees are appropriately considered, including that 55-a employees are included in lists of employees invited to take promotional exams.
- Reviewing OCME's processes for evaluating and providing individual accommodations and ensuring that information regarding the reasonable accommodation process is posted in appropriate locations and otherwise made available in accessible formats.
- Consulting with management, human resources, and other business partners, as appropriate, to ensure that all employees with disabilities who have requested support have been provided with appropriate information and direction regarding requesting reasonable accommodations.
- Conducting a comprehensive self-evaluation of all OCME's attendance, leave and various workplace policies to ensure there is no adverse impact of employees with disabilities.
- Establishing a training program to ensure that management and staff understand the agency's obligations towards applicants and employees with a disability and the goals of barrier-free access.
- Mandating that management and staff complete the Department of Citywide Administrative Services' training on disability etiquette.
- Sponsoring and supporting the formation of various Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), including an ERG for agency staff with disabilities.
- Ensuring that building management at each OCME site has a current fire and emergency management plan in place that accounts for employees and visitors with disabilities, including communication disabilities and other functional needs.

**Effective Communications and Programmatic Access –
Implementation 2024 through 2028**

OCME is committed to ensuring that its communications with individuals with disabilities are as effective as communications with everyone else. Towards that end, as part of OCME’s five-year accessibility plan, OCME will evaluate its communication methods as well as the manner in which services are provided to the public and other third parties to ensure barrier-free accessibility.

OCME will ensure that staff understands the responsibility to provide auxiliary aids and services to afford qualified individuals with disabilities, including applicants, participants, companions, and members of the public, an equal opportunity to participate in, and enjoy the benefits of, a service, program, or activity of OCME.

OCME shall consider drafting a written policy on effective communication so staff across all departments have a shared understanding of this responsibility as well as the reasonable modification processes and procedures.

In addition, OCME will ensure that members of the public understand the process for requesting auxiliary aids and services, including sign language interpretation, CART, assistive listening devices, braille, TRS, by including this information on its website and in outreach information.

OCME shall also strive to use plain, easy to understand, language in all public facing communications, including printed, electronic, webpages, etc.

OCME will include information about accessibility features, such as induction loop, and how to request additional modifications or accommodations on all event notices.

Digital Access - Implementation 2024 through 2028

OCME appreciates its responsibility to ensure equitable access to information and communication technology for people with disabilities. And in order to meet this responsibility, as part of OCME’s five-year accessibility plan, OCME plans to designate a Digital Inclusion Officer (DIO) who, upon completing requisite training, will serve as the digital accessibility advocate within OCME as well as OCME’s liaison with the NYC Office of Technology and Innovation (OTI) and the MOPD.

Thereafter, working with OTI, MOPD, and OCME leadership, the DIO will work to identify a list of digital assets that will be prioritized for accessibility enhancements over the next year, two years, etc. The DIO will also monitor samples of outgoing communications for accessibility to ensure consistency, and where problems are found, recommend corrective actions. The DIO will also collect and share data with MOPD for the bi-annual report required by Local Law 26 and identify staff training needs and collaborate with OTI and MOPD to organize the training.

The DIO will also endeavor to include “alt text” for all images on all OCME social media and its website and include captions, ASL interpretation and/or audio descriptions for all videos posted on social media platforms.

The DIO will also evaluate social media, emails, virtual meetings, etc., for accessibility.

Additionally, OCME will ensure that employees who create digital content and electronic documents as well as those who procure digital products and services are provided specific training on accessible content.

Currently, OCME’s website strives to meet the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 Level AA.

Physical Access - Implementation 2024 through 2028

OCME operates from nine separate locations which are situated in six separate facilities, four of which are owned and operated by OCME. The remaining two facilities are leased. OCME recognizes its responsibility to survey each facility carefully to reduce any barriers in line with OCME’s commitment to inclusion and equal access.

OCME is located in the following buildings owned and operated by OCME:

- **OCME Laboratories and Offices**
Charles S. Hirsch Center for Forensic Sciences
421 East 26th Street
New York, New York 10016
- **OCME Forensic Pathology Center and OCME Family Services Center**
NYU Langone Medical Center Campus
520 First Avenue
New York, NY 10016
- **OCME Forensic Pathology Center and OCME Family Services Center**
Kings County Hospital Center Campus
599 Winthrop Street
Brooklyn, NY 11203
- **OCME Family Services Center**
Queens Hospital Center Campus
160-15 82nd Drive
Jamaica, NY 11432

OCME is also located in the following leased premises:

- **OCME Family Services Center**
Bronx Family Services Center
260 East 161 Street, 4th Floor
Bronx, NY 10451
- **OCME Family Services Center**
Seaview Hospital Campus
460 Brielle Avenue
Staten Island, NY 10314

OCME's Forensic Pathology Centers house autopsy and mortuary facilities that support our operations throughout New York City. The centers are open every day of the week between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Funeral Directors visit the mortuary facilities as the decedents are released to them according to the wishes of the families.

OCME's Family Services Centers are located in each of the five boroughs of New York City. When required, Identification Unit staff will work with families to coordinate a convenient location and meeting time at one of our five centers.

OCME is developing a facilities accessibility plan which includes identifying and training staff to conduct appropriate physical accessibility evaluations, which include surveying:

- the accessibility of the doorway, entranceway, and egress in each facility;
- the accessibility of the necessary route(s) taken by members of the public and visitors in each facility after entry, including elevators, stairwells, etc.;
- the accessibility of any public space(s) within each facility/office;
- the accessibility of toilets;
- the accessibility of communications, including braille signage and any assistive listening systems in elevators and wherever else there is directional signage;
- the accessibility of the emergency notification systems; and,
- the dissemination of policy regarding addressing visitors with service animals in each building.

NYC Health and Hospitals Corporation and Jamestown Real Estate are the landlords of the buildings that house the Staten Island and Bronx Family Service Centers, respectively, and as such are responsible for their buildings' common areas, including the entrances, lobbies, elevators, common hallways, stairwells, common area bathrooms and means of egress. Nevertheless, OCME will assess those common areas and work with our landlords to address the findings of those assessments.

In all locations OCME is responsible for the agency demised areas, which include open areas, workstations, private offices, dedicated meeting rooms, service counters, dedicated pantries and kitchens, interior bathrooms, interior staircases, furniture,

dedicated ingress/egress, and interior signage.

Methodology

OCME is committed to ensuring its programs, services and activities are accessible to and usable by people with disabilities and OCME will work, not only remove any existing barriers to inclusivity, but to prevent future barriers. This Accessibility Plan outlines our strategy to ensure inclusion over the next five years and meet the requirements of all applicable laws, including the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the New York State Human Rights Law, and the New York City Human Rights Law.

With the support of senior leadership, OCME's Disability Services Facilitation Committee will examine all aspects of accessibility in OCME's policies, programs, activities, and services in order to inform OCME of the issues that must be addressed as part of this plan and to serve as a guide for future additions and amendments.

Moreover, OCME's accessibility goals will be regularly updated as programs and services change, as any determined barriers are removed, new facilities are built, and input from community members is brought forward.

Exhibit A

Notice of Nondiscrimination / Notice of Rights

New York City Office of Chief Medical Examiner Policies Prohibiting Discrimination Against People with Disabilities in Access to Services

It is the policy of the Office of Chief Medical Examiner to comply with all applicable laws including, but not limited to, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Rehabilitation Act, the New York State Human Rights Law, and the New York City Human Rights Law. The Office of Chief Medical Examiner does not discriminate on the basis of disability in the operation of its programs, services and activities and strives to be welcoming to and inclusive of people with disabilities.

Employment related complaints for employees and applicants for employment seeking a reasonable accommodation are covered under the City's EEO Policy which can be found at:

nyc.gov/assets/dcas/downloads/pdf/agencies/nyc_eeo_policy.pdf

Any member of the public who requires an auxiliary aid or service for effective communication, or a reasonable modification of policies or procedures in order to participate in our programs, services, or activities (involving matters other than employment) is invited to direct their needs and preferences to the Office of Chief Medical Examiner's Disability Service Facilitator by email, phone, or mail:

Disability Service Facilitator:

Robert D. Van Pelt

New York City Office of Chief Medical Examiner

421 East 26th Street

10th Floor, Room 1021

New York, New York 10016

Office: (212) 323-1766

Email: Rvanpelt@ocme.nyc.gov

Requests should be made as soon as possible but no later than three (3) business days before the scheduled program, service, or activity. Questions, concerns, or requests for additional information may be directed to the Office of Chief Medical Examiner's Disability Service Facilitator.

If you believe that you have been denied an auxiliary aid or service or a reasonable modification of policies or procedures that you need in order to participate in

programs, services or activities provided by the Office of Chief Medical Examiner please see the Office of Chief Medical Examiner's grievance procedure.

Exhibit B
Grievance Procedure
New York City Office of Chief Medical Examiner
Grievance Procedure for Members of the Public Alleging
Discrimination Based on Disability

Any member of the public alleging discrimination on the basis of disability in the provision of services, activities, programs, or benefits by the Office of Chief Medical Examiner may file a grievance with the Office of Chief Medical Examiner, which should contain:

- the name, address, telephone number and/or email of the grievant, and
- information about the alleged discrimination, such as the location, date, and description of the incident or alleged violation of the ADA, Rehabilitation Act, NY State Human Rights Law, or NYC Human Rights Law.

“Grievance” is the term for the allegation filed with the Office of Chief Medical Examiner by a member of the public.

“Grievant” is the term for the person alleging discrimination in the grievance.

When and How to File a Grievance

The grievance should be submitted as soon as possible, but no later than **sixty (60) calendar days** after the date of the alleged violation to:

Robert D. Van Pelt
Disability Service Facilitator
New York City Office of Chief Medical Examiner
421 East 26th Street
10th Floor, Room 10021
New York, New York 10016

Email: Rvanpelt@ocme.nyc.gov
(Please include “Grievance” in subject line.)

The Grievance may be filed in one of two ways:

- 1) By submitting the grievance in writing by mail or email using the above address;
or
- 2) Upon request, by an alternative means and delivery, such as an in-person interview or an audio recording, describing the incident or alleged violation of the ADA, Rehabilitation Act, NY State Human Rights Law, or NYC Human Rights

Law. A request for an alternative means of filing may be granted as accommodation for a grievant with a disability.

Timeline Following Filing of Grievance

Within **fifteen (15) calendar days** after receipt of the grievance, the Disability Service Facilitator or designee will contact the grievant to discuss the grievance and possible resolutions.

Within **fifteen (15) calendar days** of this contact with the grievant, the Disability Service Facilitator or designee will provide a response in writing. Grievants may request the response in an additional format accessible to them, such as large print, Braille, or audio recording. This response will address the grievance, describe the agency's position, and offer options for substantive resolution of the grievance, where applicable.

When and How to File an Appeal

The grievant may appeal the agency's decision within **thirty (30) calendar days** of receipt of the agency's response.

The Appeal may be filed in one of two ways:

- 1.) The appeal can be mailed to:

**Chief Medical Examiner Jason Graham
421 East 26th Street
13th Floor
New York, New York 10016**

- 2.) Upon request, the appeal may be made by an alternative means and delivery, such as an in-person interview or an audio recording, describing the incident or alleged violation of the ADA, Rehabilitation Act, NY State Human Rights Law, or NYC Human Rights Law. A request for an alternative means of filing may be granted as accommodation for a grievant with a disability.

Timeline Following Filing of Appeal

The Office of Chief Medical Examiner's response to the appeal will be provided to the grievant in writing within **sixty (60) days** following receipt of the appeal. Grievants may request the response in an additional format, such as large print, Braille, or audio recording. This response will address the appeal, describe the agency's decision, and offer options for substantive resolution of the appeal, where applicable.

All written grievances, appeals, and responses will be retained by the Office of Chief Medical Examiner for at least **three (3) years**.

Note: Upon request to the Disability Service Facilitator, this information can be made available in an alternative format.