

## Richard Bernstein Highlights How Design Choices Impact Real Lives in Michigan Communities

Michigan Supreme Court Justice Richard Bernstein underscores how everyday design decisions shape access, mobility, and fairness across local communities.



**Lansing, Michigan Apr 10, 2026 ([IssueWire.com](https://www.issuewire.com))** - Justice Richard Bernstein is calling attention to a critical but often overlooked issue: how everyday design choices in public spaces directly affect how people live, move, and participate in communities across Michigan.

From sidewalks and transit systems to public buildings and large venues, Bernstein emphasizes that design is not just technical—it is deeply human.

“Justice isn’t abstract,” Bernstein said. “It shows up in doors you can enter, seats you can use, and systems that treat you fairly.”

Across Michigan, the impact of design decisions is measurable:

- Nearly 1 in 4 adults in Michigan lives with a disability, affecting how they navigate public spaces daily
- Many cities still rely on infrastructure built before modern standards, with over 30% of public buildings predating updated accessibility guidelines

- Gaps in sidewalks and curb cuts continue to limit mobility, especially in suburban and smaller urban areas
- Public transit systems outside major cities often have reduced accessibility coverage, impacting access to work, healthcare, and education
- Accessibility complaints tied to public venues remain persistent, especially around seating, restrooms, and routes

Bernstein has seen firsthand how these gaps can be addressed through thoughtful implementation. Earlier in his legal career, he worked on a landmark agreement to improve accessibility at Michigan Stadium. The plan added hundreds of accessible seats and upgraded key amenities, setting a national example.

“This wasn’t about special treatment,” Bernstein said. “It was about equal access. Fans with disabilities deserve the same experience as everyone else.”

He notes that many challenges stem from decisions made early in planning. When accessibility is treated as an afterthought, costs increase and outcomes fall short.

“Big ideas fail when they stay abstract,” Bernstein said. “The work comes from asking what this looks like on the ground.”

Bernstein also stresses that accessibility is not limited to one group. Better design improves usability for parents with strollers, older adults, and anyone navigating crowded or unfamiliar environments.

“Obstacles are useful data,” he said. “They show you where systems fail.”

#### Local Action List: 10 Steps to Improve Accessibility This Week

- Walk or roll through a local area and identify barriers like uneven surfaces or blocked access points
- Report accessibility issues to your city’s public works or ADA office
- Ask local businesses about their accessibility practices and encourage improvements
- Attend a city council or planning meeting and raise accessibility questions
- Support Michigan-based disability advocacy organizations
- Encourage event organizers to plan for accessible seating and routes
- Learn how your local transit system supports accessibility—and where it falls short
- Share accurate information about accessibility rights within your community
- Advocate for accessibility reviews in new construction or renovation projects
- Start conversations about inclusion when community plans are discussed

#### Finding Trustworthy Local Resources

Residents can begin with their city or county’s official website, which often lists ADA coordinators and accessibility programs. Michigan-based disability advocacy organizations and nonprofit groups also provide reliable guidance. Public libraries and state agencies can connect individuals to verified resources. It is important to rely on sources that are current, locally relevant, and grounded in established accessibility standards.

Design decisions shape daily experience. They determine who can enter, who can participate, and who is left out. Bernstein emphasizes that meaningful change happens when communities take small,

consistent steps.

“Progress is incremental,” he said. “What matters is whether you keep moving.”

Call to Action: Take one local step today—report a barrier, ask a question, or support an accessibility effort—and help make your community more usable for everyone.

#### About Richard Bernstein

Richard Bernstein is a Justice on the Michigan Supreme Court and a nationally recognized advocate for disability rights. He is the first blind justice in the Court’s history and has dedicated his career to advancing accessibility and equal justice. Prior to joining the Court in 2015, he practiced law with a focus on disability rights and public service, contributing to landmark accessibility improvements in major public spaces. Bernstein is also an endurance athlete who has completed 27 marathons worldwide and competed in Ironman events, reflecting a lifelong commitment to discipline, resilience, and public impact.

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