

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
**Office of Disability Rights**



**Fiscal Year 2018**  
**Performance Oversight Hearing**

Testimony of  
**Mathew McCollough**  
Director

Before the  
Committee on Human Services  
Council of the District of Columbia  
The Honorable Brianne Nadeau, Chairperson

John A. Wilson Building  
Room 500  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004  
Thursday, February 21, 2019  
Time: 10:00 am

Good morning, Chairperson Nadeau and members of the Committee on Human Services. My name is Mathew McCollough, and I am the Director of the Office of Disability Rights (ODR). It gives me great pleasure to speak before this Committee today to report on the performance outcomes obtained by ODR in Fiscal Year 2018 and Fiscal Year 2019, to date.

ODR was created with the signing of the Disability Rights Protection Act of 2006, and the agency exclusively focuses on the District of Columbia Government's commitment to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and compliance with all other federal and local disability-related laws. This directive paved the way for the District to become a nationally-recognized leader in ensuring that programs, services, benefits, activities, and facilities operated by the District are fully accessible to, and usable by, people with disabilities. ODR actively supports, promotes, and works to advance the protections available under the ADA and other laws impacting our citizens with disabilities in areas of community living, employment, housing, transportation, emergency preparedness, and other Government programs and services.

Specifically, ODR provides the following services: guidance, information, referral, and technical assistance to District Government agencies and individuals accessing District Government buildings and services; resolution of ADA complaints and requests for reasonable accommodations and/or modification of policies for District employees and community members with disabilities; ADA and disability sensitivity training; aid to District agencies in accessing services relating to Sign Language Interpretation, Braille translation, and other assistive technologies; and support for the federally-funded Developmental Disabilities Council and the DC Commission on Persons with Disabilities.



ODR is fully staffed, and the agency consists of twelve full-time employees. ODR effectively collaborates and partners with nearly all District agencies and their ADA Coordinators. The ADA Coordinators serve as liaisons to ensure District employees have access to timely technical assistance, information, and resources. ODR consistently offers ongoing training to agency ADA Coordinators, employees, and contractors on topics related to ADA Title I (Employment), ADA Title II (Government Programs), Services & Activities, Disability Sensitivity, and Reasonable Accommodations and Modifications of Policies.

### **FY18 & FY19 Accomplishments**

Mayor Bowser's Fiscal Year 2018 budget made investments that supported our efforts to deliver on the promise of our shared DC values. These efforts include creating economic opportunity, making our neighborhoods safer, and providing more effective and efficient government services. We continue that effort as we work each day to fulfill our commitment to provide every District resident a fair shot at opportunity. And ODR employees hold themselves to the highest standards of accountability as public servants, demonstrating principles of Greatness, Excellence, & Discipline on a daily basis as they help deliver on the Administration's values.

In the area of architectural accessibility of District-operated facilities, ODR surveyed a total of one hundred eighty-three structures in FY18, including the completion of accessing all 102 DC Public Schools. The project's purpose evaluated the physical accessibility of these buildings, with particular emphasis on points of entry, paths of travel, and restrooms. Educational outcomes for students with disabilities are negatively impacted and altered if the physical accessibility of the school structure serves as the prominent barrier to our children's ability to access the quality of education that they deserve. By working directly with DC Public



Schools and the Department of General Services to increase accessibility, we will see greater integration and inclusion of students with disabilities and their families in DCPS programs.

In partnership with the Departments of General Services and Parks and Recreation, ODR has initiated its accessibility review of District-owned parks, recreation centers, and playgrounds. All 63 recreation centers will be surveyed by the end of Fiscal Year 2019. This partnership further strengthens Mayor Bowser's commitment toward inclusive prosperity by ensuring that children, parents, grandparents, and other family members with varying abilities enjoy all recreational opportunities and activities provided through the District Government.

ODR provided training and education to 1,671 District employees, consumers, vendors, and other stakeholders in FY18. Additionally, ODR launched the ADA Coordinator Certification Program. Twelve (12) ADA Coordinators completed the inaugural program. The ADA Coordinator Certification Program provides an additional level of education and accountability for the District by ensuring that agencies' ADA Coordinators are up to date on the latest regulations and requirements. This will be an annual program offered by ODR.

Eight hundred twelve (812) resolutions of disability discrimination complaints, requests for information and referral services, and technical assistance involving ADA compliance were successfully addressed across the District Government in FY18. This important number represents the ability of District residents with disabilities to properly access and participate in District Government programs and services; demonstrates that District employees and residents were given the appropriate resources, allowing them to make more informed choices while exercising a greater sense of empowerment over their lives, and more importantly; shows that the District and ODR are improving the trajectory and quality for all employees and community members with and without disabilities.



ODR continues to increase its outreach efforts to bring important issues regarding people with disabilities to the forefront of priorities for District agencies. The agency hosted and participated in various events, such as the annual Mayor's Disability and Diversity Expo, Developmental Disabilities Awareness Celebration, Olmstead Community Integration Conference, Discovering Deaf Worlds Expo, and the annual Voices of Change Conference.

In reference to the District's commitment in offering equitable access to our Deaf and Hard of Hearing residents, ODR's Effective Communication Program arranged and fulfilled 486 Sign Language Interpretation (SLI) requests between District Government agencies and Deaf District residents in FY18. These requests produced total expenditures of approximately \$214,000.00, of which over \$165,000.00 were allocated to District Certified Business Enterprises. ODR's Effective Communication Program not only provided services to District employees and constituents with disabilities, the Program also generates income to local business enterprises; thereby playing its role in the economic viability of the city.

As required by Federal law, ODR is the Designated State Agency for the Developmental Disabilities Council (DDC). The DDC and its staff are entirely funded by the U.S. Department on Health and Human Services and charged with identifying and addressing the most pressing needs of our District residents with developmental disabilities and their families. In FY18, the DDC supported several community-based initiatives, including DC Advocacy Partners, the development of a Parent2Parent chapter in DC, ongoing support and leadership for the Supporting Families Community of Practice and the Community of Practice for Cultural and Linguistic Competency, and our literacy and community building efforts through Next Chapter Book Clubs. Additionally, the DDC implemented a small grants program supporting a nationally recognized peer-to-peer training in self-advocacy and leadership called People



Planning Together, ongoing exploration and advocacy around healthy relationships and sex education in the disability community, and a young athlete leaders program through Special Olympics.

### **Looking Forward in FY19**

During this current fiscal year, ODR will be executing several new initiatives and projects. The agency is currently developing policy guidance on *Effective Communications with People with Disabilities* and *Service and Emotional Support Animals*. The *Effective Communications* guidance will provide direction on how the District will provide auxiliary aids and services, when necessary, to ensure that communication with people with vision, hearing, and speech disabilities is as effective as communication with people without disabilities. *Service and Emotional Support Animals* will provide Government staff with guidance on the use of service and emotional supports animals in all DC Government buildings, programs, and services.

ODR is collaborating with Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEMA) in developing inclusive and equitable emergency preparedness procedures and practices representative of the entire District community. Specifically, the agency is committed to assisting HSEMA and other agencies with developing an effective framework inclusive of transporting citizens with disabilities and their families safely in times of crisis.

Additionally, ODR will be partnering with the Department of General Services to provide training and guidance to architects contracted by the government to include accessibility standards in their construction plans for new and existing District buildings. If the DGS architectural vendors can receive the training on how to properly incorporate appropriate



elements and measurements of accessible designs in developing their blueprints, there will be fewer accessibility compliance issues requiring resolution once construction is completed. As an outcome, training will serve as an effective, long-term cost-saving measure for the District Government.

On behalf of ODR and our stakeholders, we are proud of the leadership provided by Mayor Bowser and the entire Administration to ensure that the District of Columbia continues to serve as a national model of accessibility. I extend my greatest appreciation and respect to my staff, the DDC, and the DC Commission on Persons with Disabilities for their tireless efforts and commitment in improving the quality of life for all citizens with and without disabilities. Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak before this esteemed Committee and the Council. My staff and I welcome any questions you may have.

