

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Office of Disability Rights



Fiscal Year 2019
Performance Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
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Director

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

John A. Wilson Building
Room 412
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004
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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 the Committee today to report on performance outcomes and achievements by ODR in Fiscal Year 2019 and Fiscal Year 2020, to date.

This year the United States is celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). On July 26, 1990, the 41st President of the United States, George Herbert Walker Bush, signed the ADA into law, exclaiming:

And now I sign legislation which takes a sledgehammer to another wall, one which has for too many generations separated Americans with disabilities from the freedom they could glimpse, but not grasp. Once again, we rejoice as this barrier falls for claiming together we will not accept, we will not excuse, we will not tolerate discrimination in America.

The Office of Disability Rights exclusively focuses on the District Government's commitment to the ADA and compliance with all other federal and local disability-related laws. ODR is an agency consisting of twelve full-time employees, and I am proud to say that more than 60% of our staff consists of people with disabilities. Furthermore, five employees, including myself, have been with the agency since its inception in 2008. Due to the outstanding commitment and excellence demonstrated by my staff and our partners, both within the Government and the Community, the District continues to be a nationally-recognized leader in ensuring that programs, services, and facilities are fully accessible to, and useable by, people with disabilities.

ODR provides guidance, information, referral, and technical assistance to District Government agencies and individuals accessing District Government buildings and services;



informal 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 (DDC) and the DC Commission on Persons with Disabilities.

Fiscal Year 2019 Achievements

Mayor Bowser's Fiscal Year 2019 budget made vital investments supporting 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 these efforts as we work each day to fulfill our commitment to provide every District resident a fair shot at opportunity. With Mayor Bowser's leadership and support, the District Government and ODR achieved clear outcomes and improvements in furthering the rights of our residents with disabilities and their families in areas of community living, recreation, employment, health care, emergency preparedness, and other Government programs and services in the past year.

Pursuant to Mayor's Order 2017-10, ODR, in partnership with several agencies, began to track the number of ADA Reasonable Accommodations provided to their employees and residents seeking access to the District Government. Twenty-seven (27) agencies shared their data, and a total of 459 Reasonable Accommodations were provided to agency employees and District residents with disabilities in 2019. This number signifies that numerous employees stayed and remained productive in their positions, while hundreds of District residents received



the necessary services through the Government. ODR is extremely proud of the agencies' involvement and commitment in complying with the ADA.

ODR is also proud to share that we met with numerous domestic and international delegations as a result of our successful work here in the District. Representatives from the Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, Country of Georgia, and the Kingdoms of Jordan and Saudi Arabia all contacted ODR to discuss the United States and the District Government's best practices in accessibility, enforcement, compliance, and inclusion. His Royal Highness Prince Mired Raad Zeid Al-Hussein is responsible for implementing The Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities No. 20 which was established in 2017. In partnership with the U.S. Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia sponsored an all-women delegation to learn more about the various social services systems in the United States. In recognition of this historic event, ODR collaborated with the Department of Aging and Community Living and Child and Family Services Agency in presenting to the Saudi Arabian delegation and highlight the District's social services system. The world is positively changing for all citizens with disabilities, and these are just a few examples of where the District of Columbia is viewed as a national and international leader in the disability field.

In the area of architectural accessibility of District-operated facilities, ODR surveyed a total of 79 structures, including ADA assessments on 64 recreation centers. The project's purpose was to evaluate the physical accessibility of these buildings, with particular emphasis on points of entry, paths of travel, and restrooms. Access to recreation opportunities can serve as great equalizers to adults and children maintaining healthy lifestyles, strengthening relationships, and minimizing potential health disparities occurring throughout their lifetime. By partnering



with the Departments of General Services and Parks and Recreation to increase accessibility, we are working together to improve the overall accessibility for our District residents with disabilities and their families.

In the past fiscal year, ODR made tremendous strides in supporting people with disabilities in the area of employment. During the 2018 National Disability Employment Awareness Month (October), ODR and DDC coordinated and arranged job shadowing events for 30 high school students, college students, and job-seekers with disabilities. Partnering with District Government agencies and community-based organizations, the 30 participants received one-on-one mentoring and highlighted possible internship and employment opportunities. ODR also served as an internship host site for: a University of Virginia student sponsored by the American Association of People with Disabilities; 2 young adults taking part in the Aspiring Professionals Program coordinated by the Department on Disabilities Services, and; a student from Eastern Senior High School.

ODR continues to honor the District's commitment to offer equitable access to our Deaf and Hard of Hearing residents. ODR's Effective Communication Program arranged and fulfilled 487 Sign Language Interpretation (SLI) requests between District Government agencies and Deaf District residents during Fiscal Year 2019. These requests produced total expenditures of approximately \$211,000.00, of which over \$200,000 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.

ODR conducted over 20 individual training events and provided education to 1,671 District employees, consumers, vendors, and other stakeholders on topics related to ADA Title I



(Employment), ADA Title II (Government Programs, Services & Activities), Disability Sensitivity, and Reasonable Accommodations and Modifications of Policies. Additionally, ODR executed the second year of the ADA Coordinator Certification Program, and 12 agency employees successfully completed the annual Certification 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.

ODR continues to increase its outreach efforts to bring important issues regarding people with disabilities to the forefront of priorities for District agencies in Fiscal Year 2019. The agency hosted and/or participated in 22 community events, such as the annual Mayor's Disability and Diversity Expo, Developmental Disabilities Awareness Celebration, Olmstead Community Integration Conference, Fair Housing Symposium, and the annual Voices of Change Transition Conference.

As required by Federal law, ODR is the Designated State Agency for the 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 FY19, the DDC conducted several "firsts" in an effort to respond to long communicated needs of the community. When the DC Supporting Families Community of Practice began in 2013, the need for formal peer supports was identified. In FY19, a grant from the DDC enabled the launch of Family Ties of DC, a formally recognized chapter of Parent to Parent USA. The DDC collaborated with the Department on Disability Services, the Mayor's Office on Latino Affairs, DC Human Resources, and the Quality Trust for Individuals with Disabilities to host the first Latinx Conference on Disabilities – an annual



conference about disabilities conducted entirely in Spanish and first of its kind in the District. The DDC organized the first annual Autism Acceptance Resource Fair to share information and build community among autistic people, their families, and other supporters. Finally, the DDC members believe that District communities have their own best ideas in solving the problems they are facing. With this in mind, the DDC launched the *Innovation Grants* – a competitive small grant program for community organizations and groups. In FY19, the DDC awarded nearly \$30,000 in small grants and they intend on doubling the amount of grant awards in Fiscal Year 2020.

Looking Forward in Fiscal Year 2020

ODR is excited in executing several new initiatives and projects during Fiscal Year 2020. In partnership with the Departments of Health Care Finance, Behavioral Health, Disability Services, and Aging and Community Living, the agency will be developing a new Olmstead Community Integration Plan. The new Olmstead Plan will illustrate the District's commitment to policy and programmatic changes that enable our District residents with disabilities and senior citizens to make choices to leave long-term institutional care and transition into least restrictive environments that meet both their daily living and treatment needs. This new three-year Olmstead Plan will focus attention on housing, healthcare, and employment. Access to a place to live, adequate healthcare, and a way to support oneself are three keys to a successful transition.

ODR will continue our focus on making District Government facilities and spaces physically accessible to all District residents with and without disabilities. Specifically, ODR will partner with the DC Board of Elections (DCBOE) in identifying polling sites requiring accessibility assessments in preparation of the upcoming Primary and Presidential Elections, offering ADA recommendations. Additionally, ODR will conduct accessibility assessments on



all District parks. We also will continue our commitments with the Homeland Security and Emergency Management in developing inclusive and equitable emergency preparedness plans, procedures, and practices representative of the entire District community. Specifically, the agency will pay particular attention to effective communications, emergency sheltering, post-emergency canvassing, accessible transportation, high-rise building evacuations, and power outages.

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. As previously mentioned, this great Nation will be celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. 2020 will be a very important time for the Office of Disability Rights and our supporters, as we all strive to improve the overall trajectory and quality of life for all citizens with disabilities and their families today and beyond. 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.

