

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



**Fiscal Year 2021**  
**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

Thursday, February 10, 2022  
John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Virtual Meeting  
10:00 am

Good afternoon, 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 ODR's performance outcomes in Fiscal Year 2021 and Fiscal Year 2022, to date.

ODR was created with the signing of the Disability Rights Protection Act of 2006, and the agency focuses exclusively 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 and works to advance the protections available under the ADA and other laws impacting our citizens with disabilities as they relate to community living, employment, housing, transportation, emergency preparedness, and other Government programs and services.

Our agency proudly provides the following services: guidance, information, and technical assistance to District Government agencies and individuals accessing District Government buildings and services; resolution of requests for reasonable accommodation and modification of policies for District employees and community members with disabilities regarding accessibility to District buildings, services, programs and activities; ADA and sensitivity training; aid to District agencies in accessing effective communication services involving sign language interpretation, braille, and other assistive technologies, and; administrative support for the federally-funded Developmental Disabilities Council and the DC Commission on Persons with Disabilities.



The ADA reminds us of the importance of greater access and inclusivity as the District Government continues to serve all residents, including constituents with access and functional needs, through the COVID-19 pandemic. Mayor Bowser’s FY2021 budget supported critical investments that supported our efforts to deliver on the promise of our shared DC values. These efforts include providing more economic opportunities, placing much needed investments in infrastructure and making our neighborhoods safer, and offering effective and efficient government services. ODR staff continued those efforts as we work each day to fulfill our commitment to provide every District resident with an opportunity to change their trajectory for a better quality of life. Further, ODR employees hold themselves to the highest standards of accountability as public servants, demonstrating principles of greatness, excellence, and discipline daily as we help deliver on this Administration’s promises and values.

### **FY2021 & FY2022 Accomplishments**

In FY2021, ODR was proud to introduce the District’s *Olmstead Community Integration Plan – One Community for All*<sup>1</sup>, covering calendar years 2021-2024. The new Plan is based on the 1999 mandate in the seminal *Olmstead v. L.C.* Supreme Court case and builds on the progress made in the 2017-2020 Plan. The development of the new *Olmstead Community Integration Plan* involved collaboration with, and contributions from, numerous District residents with disabilities, their family members, disability organizations, community advocates, and fourteen (14) government agencies. The *Olmstead Plan* identifies and focuses on three main

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<sup>1</sup> [Olmstead Community Integration Plan - DC One Community for All | odr](#)



priorities: Housing; Health Care and Wellness Supports; and Employment. In addition, the *Olmstead Plan* includes the following information:

1. Tracking the number of District residents who transition to the community from long term care utilizing DC Government supports and services.
2. Highlighting District government programs and policies that assist people with transitioning from long-term care into the community.
3. Serving as a guide for a person in transition to let them know about services available to them under these three priorities.

More and more of our partner agencies used the District-wide ADA Compliance Tracker in the last fiscal year, another achievement we would like to highlight. In FY2020, only ten (10) agencies used the ADA Compliance Tracker to record their efforts with reasonable accommodation requests, complaints, and technical assistance. In the past fiscal year, the number utilizing the ADA Compliance Tracker grew to more than thirty (30) District agencies. This outstanding achievement represents more in-depth partnerships and interventions with and among other District agencies while supporting the District Government's compliance with the ADA. Going forward, ODR will proceed with its education and outreach efforts to encourage new agencies utilize the system in hopes of continuous upward, trajectory and use of the ADA Compliance Tracker.

As part of its architectural accessibility work for District-operated facilities, ODR surveyed a total of one hundred twenty-six (126) physical structures and locations in FY2021. Most of the structures and properties accessed for accessibility were public parks and recreation



centers under the purview of the Departments of Parks and Recreation and General Services. It should be noted that there are over two hundred (200) District parks, and ODR assessed over seventy-five (75) locations in the previous fiscal year. At the time of this hearing, ODR has completed the evaluation assessments of over fifty percent (50%) of the District parks, and the agency anticipates in completing the project by the end of FY2022. This two-year project represents Mayor Bowser's commitment toward inclusive prosperity for all our children, parents, grandparents, and other family members with varying abilities while enjoying all recreational opportunities and activities provided by the District Government.

In FY2021, ODR provided ADA training and education to one thousand six hundred fifty-three (1,653) District employees, grantees, residents, and other stakeholders. Of particular note, ODR conducted a COVID-19 Virtual Talking Series. Topics included: 1. *The Impact of Covid-19 on the Lives of People with Disabilities Living in Congregate Settings*; 2. *Reasonable Accommodation: Best Practices for Return to Work During Covid-19*; and 3. *The Impact of Covid-19 on the Lives of People with Behavior Health and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*. At the conclusion, a total of two hundred (200) participants attended the COVID-19 Virtual Talking Series.

With regards to the District's commitment to offering equitable access to our Deaf and Hard of Hearing residents, ODR's Effective Communication Program arranged and fulfilled five hundred seventy-seven (577) sign language requests between District Government agencies and Deaf residents in FY2021. These requests totaled \$230,174, of which ninety-three percent (93%) of the funding was allocated directly to the District's Certified Business Enterprises.



ODR continued its outreach efforts to bring important issues regarding people with disabilities to the forefront of priorities for District agencies. One thousand one hundred twenty-four (1,124) people participated in events conducted, sponsored, and hosted by ODR, including the annual Mayor’s Disability and Diversity Expo and the Olmstead Community Integration Conference, in FY2021. Furthermore, the agency participated in several events conducted by other Federal and District Government agencies and community-based organizations, including the United States Department of Navy, DC Department of Behavioral Health, the Legal Counsel for the Elderly, and Pennsylvania State University.

Four hundred twenty-one (421) requests for information and referral services, resolutions of disability discrimination complaints, and technical assistance involving ADA compliance were successfully addressed across the District Government in FY2021. This number represents our residents’ ability to properly access and participate in the District Government’s programs and services; demonstrates that District employees and residents were given the appropriate resources, allowing them to make informed choices while feeling empowered during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency; and shows that the District and ODR are improving the trajectory and quality of life for all District residents and employees.

As required by Federal law, ODR is the Designated State Agency for the Developmental Disabilities Council<sup>2</sup> (DDC). The DDC is fully funded by federal dollars appropriated according to the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 (DD Act) through the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Community Living (ACL).

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<sup>2</sup> [ddc](#)



The DD Act mandates that DD Councils engage in advocacy, capacity building, and systems change to better the lives of DC residents with developmental disabilities and their families. On September 30, 2021, the DDC submitted their Five-Year State Plan for Fiscal Years 2022-2026 to ACL. The DDC received conditional approval and is moving forward to implementing the State Plan's three major goals: 1. Self-determination and Leadership; 2. Employment; and 3. Community Living.

Throughout the fiscal year, the DDC supported projects including:

- Parent Cafés for caregivers of children ages 0-5;
- Family Ties of DC to encourage peer supports for parents of children with disabilities; and
- Ongoing engagement with the Latinx disability community through resource-focused webinars and the annual conference.

The DDC has prioritized accessibility, language access, and cultural and linguistic competence through these activities.

### **Looking Forward in Fiscal Year 2022**

ODR wishes to express our gratitude to Mayor Bowser and the DC Council by approving an enhancement to the agency's FY2022 budget. This fiscal year's budget includes two full-time ASL Interpreter positions, increasing ODR's total personnel to fourteen (14). Presently, one ASL professional has already been hired and ODR is in active recruitment for the second ASL position. These ASL professionals will further enhance the District's capabilities in effectively



communicating with the Deaf community during the Mayor’s press conferences, HSEMA’s emergency-related events and activities, and other public events provided through the District Government.

ODR will be executing several initiatives and projects throughout Fiscal Year 2022. In partnership with the DC Board of Elections, DGS, and other government agencies and community stakeholders, ODR will conduct accessibility assessments on polling locations in preparation of the upcoming Primary and General Elections later this year. The project’s purpose will evaluate the physical accessibility of these buildings, with particular emphasis on points of entry and exit, parking, and paths of travel. These activities are critical in allowing District residents exercise their constitutional right to vote in safe, accessible, and secured locations.

During this fiscal year, ODR will begin a two-year initiative to gather updated ADA Accessibility Plans from agencies within the District government. This initiative was previously conducted five years ago in 2017. The ADA Accessibility Plan allows the agency to evaluate its programs and services in four areas:

1. ADA Coordinator, Notice & Grievance Procedures
2. General Effective Communications
3. Website Accessibility
4. Physical Accessibility of Government Facilities.





Numerous agencies have changed their locations, programs, and services since 2017, so conducting this initiative over the next two years is significant and timely.

ODR will be developing a new informative training video on Title II of the ADA this year, as well. The Title II training video will be in the same vein as ODR's highly successfully *Awkward Bob* Disability Sensitivity Video<sup>3</sup>. Since its release, governments and companies in the United States and across the globe have requested to incorporate the *Awkward Bob* video into their training programs. In Fiscal Year 2021, the United Cerebral Palsy of Australia, West Coast REACH Association in Canada, Federal Bureau of Investigations, T-Mobile, Sprint, Society of Human Resource Management, City of Baltimore Civil Rights Office, and others approached ODR requesting permission to show our video in their training events. ODR hopes the upcoming Title II video will receive the same acclaim, especially among other state and local governments in the United States.

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 to improving the trajectory and quality of life for all District residents with and without disabilities. Thank you very much for this opportunity to speak before this esteemed Committee and the Council. I welcome any questions you may have.

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<sup>3</sup> [Video Trainings by the Office of Disability Rights | odr \(dc.gov\)](#)

