GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

**Office of Disability Rights**



**Fiscal Year 2017**

**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

Wednesday, February 14, 2018

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 ambitious performance outcomes achieved by ODR in Fiscal Year 2017 and Fiscal Year 2018, to date.

The doors of our agency opened ten years ago with the signing of the Disability Rights Protection Act of 2006. ODR was created to exclusively focus 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 are fully accessible to, and useable 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 employment, state and local government, public accommodations, commercial facilities, and transportation.

Specifically, 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 services involving Sign Language Interpretation, Braille Interpretation, and other assistive technologies; and support for the federally-funded Developmental Disabilities Council and the DC Commission on Persons with Disabilities.

**Infrastructure**

Ten years ago, ODR started with the first agency Director Eve Hill and one other employee. ODR, which is fully staffed, has since grown to consist of twelve full-time employees. ODR effectively collaborates and partners with nearly all District agencies and their 80-100 ADA Coordinators. The ADA Coordinators serve as ODR liaisons to ensure District employees have access to timely technical assistance and other needed information. ODR consistently offers training to the team of ADA Coordinators annually on topics related to ADA Title I (Employment), ADA Title II (Government Programs), Services & Activities, Disability Sensitivity, and Reasonable Accommodations & Modifications of Policies.

**FY17 & FY18 Accomplishments**

All ODR employees hold themselves to the highest standards of accountability as public servants, demonstrating principles of *Greatness, Excellence, & Discipline* on a daily basis. Mayor Bowser’s Fiscal Year 2017 Budget reflected our deep commitment to DC values by making investments that will provide all residents of the District of Columbia with the opportunity to succeed. We remain focused each day on creating pathways to the middle class by investing in education, affordable housing, infrastructure, public safety, and people.

Regarding the Accessibility of District Facilities, ODR assessed at least fifty-six DC Public Schools. A primary focus of this work was to assess each school’s physical accessibility and safe path of travel for all students with and without disabilities and their families.

ODR trained and educated over one thousand (1,000) employees, consumers, vendors, and other stakeholders. Additionally, our *Awkward No More* disability sensitivity training video has received global recognition and acclaim, and the resource is now being used by several private companies and municipalities in training their employees on how to interact with and treat people with disabilities, including:

* + American Airlines
  + Yellow Cab of DC (500 total trained)
  + IAG of Australia
  + CT Judicial Branch
  + City of St Petersburg, FL (3,416 total trained)
  + Government of Hall County, GA (700 trained in FY17, 3,000 to be trained in FY18)
  + Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work
  + The 45th Presidential Inauguration Committee

Regarding Complaints, Information, and Technical Assistance (CITA), ODR successfully managed requests from 581 consumers and stakeholders for resolution of disability discrimination complaints, requests for information and referral services to other District agencies, and technical assistance involving ADA compliance.

ODR engaged in 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 Developmental Disabilities Awareness Conference, Olmstead Community Integration Conference, Blind Awareness Day, Behavioral and Mental Health Forum, Annual Disability Awareness Expo, and Deaf Awareness Day.

Regarding the District’s commitment to meeting our “Effective Communications” mandate with our Deaf and Hard of Hearing members, ODR ensured Sign Language Interpreter Services to nearly 600 constituents. Additionally, we are planning two forums emphasizing the needs and concerns of our Deaf and Hard of Hearing citizens in Fiscal Year 2018.

ODR kicked off Fiscal Year 2018 with the 10th Annual Mayor’s Disability Awareness Expo, where we collaborated with over twenty District agencies and community-based partners and educated over 300 people in attendance.

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. This partnership further strengthens Mayor Bowser’s commitment towards *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.

In Fiscal Year 2018, ODR will partner with DDOT to establish a public awareness campaign to educate constituents on how to use dockless bikes safely. Currently, the dockless bikes can serve as potential barriers in the direct path of travel and access to District programs, services, and activities by our DC residents with disabilities and their families, and continued education is needed.

ODR is ensuring effective implementation of Mayor’s Order 2017-10. This Order requires all District government agencies to appoint an ADA Coordinator to provide ODR, through a centralized database, information regarding reasonable accommodation requests and allegations involving disability discrimination. Additionally, we are launching a District-wide ADA Coordinator Certification Program for all agency ADA Coordinators.

Regarding Workplace Accessibility, ODR is directing all District agencies to review their worksites for programmatic and physical accessibility. We are providing training and support for this significant initiative. This strategy upholds Mayor Bowser’s commitment to strengthening *pathways to the middle class* by ensuring that District employees with disabilities maintain and/or obtain competitive, integrated employment.

ODR serves as the Designated State Agency (DSA) for the Developmental Disabilities Council (DDC). The United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living, has provided this important designation to the agency. In FY17, the DDC supported initiatives that increased capacity for self-advocacy and promoted supported decision-making and human rights of DC residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and explored the need of establishing more formal structures of person-centered and peer supports for this community. Throughout this current fiscal year, the DDC members are furthering their mission by supporting the following best practice programs: DC Advocacy Partners, which will increase capacity for advocacy and leadership; establishing a Family2Family organization that will provide peer supports to families, and; Next Chapter Book Clubs that will facilitate community integration. Mayor Bowser has consistently expressed that District agencies must utilize our community-based partners to establish *pathways to the middle class* and foster *inclusive prosperity* for all. In partnership with ODR, the DDC actively seeks to make these themes a reality for all our District residents with I/DD and their families.

On behalf of the Office of Disability Rights 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 gratitude and thanks to my agency 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.