

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Office of Disability Rights



Fiscal Year 2021
Budget 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
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004
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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 on the agency's proposed Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21) budget.

With a focus on health, opportunity, prosperity, and equity (HOPE), this budget provides a sense of hope that even in times of unprecedented crisis, we can live up to our DC values and provide every Washingtonian, with and without disabilities, an opportunity for a fair shot. Furthermore, for our community, the District's commitment to building a strong and resilient economy represents more investments in our people and neighborhoods.

Our Purpose

Our work at ODR 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. The agency is committed to full integration, inclusion, and self-determination, of those with disabilities. The District serves as a nationally-recognized leader in ensuring programs, services, and facilities 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 community living, employment, housing, transportation, emergency preparedness, and other Government programs, activities, services.

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. In addition ODR offers ADA and Sensitivity Training; aid to District agencies in accessing effective communication services involving sign language interpretation, braille interpretation, and other assistive technologies, and; provide staff and administrative support to the federally-funded Developmental Disabilities Council and the DC Commission on Persons with Disabilities.

Fiscal Year 2021 Budget

As detailed in our budget chapter, ODR proposes a total operating budget of \$2,105,734 in Fiscal Year 2021. Federal funding of \$660,000 from the Administration of Community Living, United States Department of Health and Human Services, is allocated to the Developmental Disabilities Council to assist in their efforts to improve the quality of life for all District residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. Another \$293,000 represents intra-district funding to align the agency's budget with estimates for our Sign Language Interpretation Memoranda of Understanding with multiple District agencies. The remaining operating budget of \$1,430,000 constitutes twelve (12) staff in their work to ensure the District of Columbia continues to serve as a national model city of accessibility.

Looking Toward the Future

The Mayor's Fiscal Year 2021 Budget will allow ODR to continue offering strong leadership, direction, and implementation of Mayor's Order 2017-10. The Order requires all District government agencies to appoint an ADA Coordinator to provide ODR information regarding reasonable accommodation requests and allegations involving disability discrimination. We are making continued improvements to our District-wide ADA Coordinator Certification Program. This Certification Program is the agency's Train-the-Trainer initiative for



all ADA Coordinators and employees who support ADA compliance and accessibility initiatives across the District Government. ODR will utilize its resources to provide expert information, guidance, and referrals to individuals who have questions about disability rights and to increase sign-language access for District agencies.

Additionally, we will direct our expertise and energies to the following projects in FY21:

- Host the Mayor's 13th Disability and Diversity Expo in October with a particular theme on community, integration, and respect.
- In partnership with the Departments of Health Care Finance, Behavioral Health, Aging and Community Living, and Disability Services, ODR will be finalizing and implementing a new, multi-year Olmstead Community Integration Plan. The new Plan will particularly focus on how District residents are accessing the appropriate housing, health care, and employment programs and resources in order for them to transition into and/or remain in integrated community settings.
- Effectively support the DC Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency and all other partnering agencies in successfully implementing and executing the requirements of the 2019 United Spinal Association settlement with particular attention to effective emergency plans in accordance with the ADA.
- In partnership with the Board of Elections and Department of General Services, conduct assessments and provide accessibility recommendations on polling locations identified for the 2020 Presidential and local elections.
- In collaboration with the Department of General Services, provide training and guidance to architects contracted by the government to include accessibility standards in their construction plans for new and existing District buildings.



- Continue cultivating opportunities for respect and social inclusion among senior citizens, neighbors, and visitors through multi-generational, ethnic and cultural activities in partnership with the Age-Friendly DC 2023 Taskforce.
- The Developmental Disabilities Council will be developing the implementation of the new Five Year State Plan for fiscal years 2022-2026. The proposed goals and outcomes described in the State Plan will be based on extensive community outreach activities conducted by the DDC, including but not limited to: A) Development of a needs assessment; B) Conducting multiple community forums & focus groups, and C) Disseminating surveys to District residents with developmental disabilities, family members, and other community stakeholders representing all 8 wards.

In closing, the Office of Disability Rights has an even stronger future ahead, because the agency is given the appropriate and necessary resources to achieve our Fiscal Year 2021 goals. On behalf of ODR and our stakeholders, we are proud of the strong leadership provided by Mayor Bowser and her Administration to ensure 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 trajectory and quality of life for all citizens with and without disabilities. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have. Thank you very much for this opportunity to provide testimony before this esteemed Committee and the Council.

