

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Office of Disability Rights



Fiscal Year 2020
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
Room 123
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004
Thursday, April 4, 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 on the agency's proposed Fiscal Year 2020 (FY20) budget. In March, Mayor Bowser presented the District's 24th consecutive balanced budget entitled, "A Fair Shot." Mayor Bowser's FY20 budget makes strong, strategic investments in affordable and accessible housing, education, human services, public safety, transportation, infrastructure, and employment services that provide our residents with disabilities with a viable pathway to the middle class. Furthermore, these investments are reflective of the prominent needs and priorities identified by District residents at the Budget Engagement Forums conducted in the past few months during the budget formulation process.

Our Purpose

In the year of 2020, the United States will be 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, remarking:

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.

His presidency and legacy will forever be revered by this grateful nation and the disability community.



Our work at ODR 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. The District serves as a nationally-recognized leader in ensuring that programs, services, 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 community living, employment, housing, transportation, emergency preparedness, and other Government programs and 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; 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 2020 Budget

As detailed in our budget chapter, ODR proposes a total operating budget of \$2,130,688, an increase of \$67,113 from Fiscal Year 2019. Federal funding of \$651,000 is allocated to the Developmental Disabilities Council to assist in their efforts to improve the quality of life for all District residents with developmental disabilities and their families. Another \$292,633 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 \$1,187,055 constitutes twelve (12) staff in their unwavering commitment for Greatness, Excellence, and Discipline while ensuring that the District of Columbia continues to serve as a national model city of accessibility.

Looking Toward the Future

The Mayor's Fiscal Year 2020 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 District ADA Coordinators and employees who support ADA compliance and accessibility initiatives. ODR will utilize its resources to provide expert information, assistance, 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 FY20:

- Host the Mayor's Disability and Diversity Expo in October, which will also serve as a celebration of the 12th Anniversary of ODR and our continued commitment to full inclusion and accessibility.
- Effectively support all partnering agencies in developing and implementing effective emergency plans and initiatives in accordance with the ADA.



- In partnership with the Departments of General Services and Parks and Recreation, complete accessibility assessments on all parks in the District.
- 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 to cultivate 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.
- In collaboration with multiple partners, conduct a series of educational events to the general public throughout 2020 in celebration of the 30th Anniversary of the ADA.

Finally, in recognition of the 30-year mark for the ADA, ODR congratulates the members of Project ACTION! on their 30th Anniversary. Project ACTION! is the District’s self-advocacy organization, and they were honored for their work within the disability community during the DD Awareness Month Celebration in March. DDS and ODR extend our gratitude to Councilmember Nadeau for sending Mr. David Meni on behalf of the Committee on Human Services to honor Project ACTION! and their achievements.

In closing, the Office of Disability Rights possesses a strong future, because the agency is given the appropriate and necessary resources to achieve our Fiscal Year 2020 goals. On behalf of ODR and our stakeholders, we are proud of the strong leadership provided by Mayor Bowser and her 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 trajectory and 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.

