

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Office of Disability Rights



Fiscal Year 2020
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 18, 2021
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Virtual Meeting
12:00 pm

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 2020 and Fiscal Year 2021, to date.

ODR was created with the signing of the Disability Rights Protection Act of 2006, and the agency 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. 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.



In 2020, the United States celebrated the 30th Anniversary of the ADA. 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 these extraordinary times of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Since the Public Health Emergency was announced nearly a year ago, all ODR employees have been fulfilling their duties remotely. Though ODR's operations have been modified due to COVID-19, the agency produced and obtained a number of impressive accomplishments and deliverables throughout FY 2020 and FY 2021.

FY2020 & FY2021 Accomplishments

Mayor Bowser's Fiscal Year 2020 budget supported critical investments that supported 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. ODR staff continued that effort 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. And ODR employees hold themselves to the highest standards of accountability as public servants, demonstrating principles of greatness, excellence, and discipline on a daily basis as they help deliver on the Administration's values.

In honor of the ADA's 30th Anniversary, ODR sponsored the "#ADA30" media campaign¹ in July 2020. The media campaign featured influential District residents working to further the

¹ [#ADA30 People | odr \(dc.gov\)](#)



mission of the ADA, including District and national leaders, advocates, employees, and local business leaders.

As part of its architectural accessibility work for District-operated facilities, ODR surveyed a total of one hundred twenty-five (125) physical structures in FY20, including the evaluation of accessibility at over 90 polling locations in preparation for the District’s 2020 Primary and Presidential Elections. The project’s purpose was to evaluate the physical accessibility of these buildings, with particular emphasis on points of entry and exit, parking, and paths of travel. Additionally, ODR was involved in surveying the following COVID-19 testing sites to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities and with other access and functional needs:

- UDC—Bertie Backus campus;
- Judiciary Square—5th and F St NW;
- UMC Hospital site—Southern Avenue; and
- Washington Convention Center—Alternative Care Site.

By working directly with the DC Board of Elections, the Departments of General Services, and DC Health, ODR helped make sure District residents were able to get tested for COVID-19 and exercise their constitutional right to vote in safe and secured locations.

ODR provided ADA training and education to 978 District employees, consumers, vendors, and other stakeholders throughout Fiscal Year 2020. (The agency’s target was 1,000 individuals trained.) As the COVID-19 pandemic forced ODR to modify its operations during Q2 and Q3 of FY2020, many of the staff needed to receive training and become familiar with many of the online platforms (e.g., MS Teams, WebEx, and Zoom) in order to provide virtual



training sessions on the ADA for constituents. As staff became more comfortable performing the training sessions virtually in the third and fourth quarters, the number of attendees at sessions steadily rose.

In FY2020, four hundred fifty-seven (457) requests for information and referral services, resolutions of disability discrimination complaints, and technical assistance involving ADA compliance were successfully addressed across the District Government. This number represents the ability of District residents with disabilities to properly access and participate in District Government programs and services; demonstrates that District employees and residents were given the appropriate resources, allowing them to make more informed choices while exercising a greater sense of empowerment over their lives during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, and more importantly; shows that the District and ODR are improving the trajectory and quality of life for all employees and community members with disabilities.

ODR continued to increase its outreach efforts to bring important issues regarding people with disabilities to the forefront of priorities for District agencies. Nine hundred eighty-nine (989) 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 FY2020. Furthermore, the agency participated in several events conducted by other Federal and District Government agencies and community-based organizations, including the Mayor's Office on Volunteerism and Partnerships Community Emergency Response Team Conference (CERT Con), the Department of Defense's Disability Employment Conference, Age-Friendly DC Taskforce, and the Legal Counsel for the Elderly's Community Conference.

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 545



Sign Language Interpretation requests between District Government agencies and Deaf residents in FY2020. These requests totaled \$224,000, of which over \$200,000.00 were allocated directly to Certified Business Enterprises (CBEs). 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 a role in ensuring the economic viability of the city.

As required by Federal law, ODR is the Designated State Agency for the Developmental Disabilities Council² (DDC). The DDC and its staff are entirely funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Community Living. The DDC's mission is to create change that eliminates discrimination and removes barriers for District residents with developmental disabilities to full inclusion through their advocacy. In FY20, the DDC supported several initiatives, including DC Advocacy Partners and Family Ties of DC but by mid-year, they turned their attention quickly to COVID-19 and worked to make a positive impact in our community. The DDC awarded \$37,724 in COVID-19 Relief Grants, which supported nearly 100 people with tablets, smart-phones, and internet access who did not previously have it. At the beginning of the fiscal year, prior to the pandemic, the DDC had awarded \$64,080 in Innovation Grants, which supported innovative projects related to self-advocacy in healthcare, supporting employment in the Ethiopian community, and greater civic, social, and community engagement.

² [ddc](#)



Looking Forward in Fiscal Year 2021

ODR will be executing several initiatives and projects throughout Fiscal Year 2021. In partnership with multiple agencies and community stakeholders, ODR will be developing a new 3-year *Olmstead Community Integration Plan*³. The 2021-2023 *Plan* will identify goals, metrics, and priorities the District must achieve under the law for residents with disabilities to live in the community, in the most integrated setting possible. The new *Plan* will focus on three priority areas: 1) Housing; 2) Healthcare and wellness supports; and 3) Employment. The District Government and the participating agencies recognize that this *Olmstead Community Integration Plan* is a living document and we welcome the DC Council's input as we continue developing this significant document.

The agency is currently developing policy guidance on *Service and Assistance Animals*. The *Service and Assistance Animals* will provide Government staff with guidance on the use of service and assistance animals in all DC Government buildings, programs, and services. The Policy Guidance is currently in draft form and ODR intends to finalize this guidance prior to the end of FY 2021.

ODR will continue to conduct ADA assessments on District-owned parks throughout FY2021. The COVID-19 pandemic extremely limited the agency's ability to conduct the ADA assessments on all 200 District-owned parks in FY2020. Due to ODR's current operational

³ [Olmstead Community Integration Plan - DC One Community for All | odr](#)



status of the agency under the pandemic, this project will be conducted and executed over the course of FYs 2021 and 2022.

The DDC is currently in the process of developing their next Five-Year State Plan (FY2022-2026), which will be submitted to the Federal Government on August 15, 2021. The DDC members are deeply engaged with District residents to gather feedback about what they would like to see in the State Plan. Finally, the DDC continues to engage in a number of advocacy initiatives including but not limited to: Supporting full funding of the Direct Service Providers Payment Rate Act of 2019; Encouraging data collection about how COVID-19 affects District residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD); Prioritizing people with IDD in the vaccination process; Revising eligibility for the DC Developmental Disabilities Administration services to include people with developmental disabilities, and; Supporting the process of re-thinking how law enforcement interacts with our communities.

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.

