

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
Office of Disability Rights  
Annual Performance Oversight Hearing  
Committee on Government Operations and the Environment

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10:00 am

John A. Wilson Building  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Good afternoon Councilmember Cheh and other distinguished members of the Committee and staff. I am Derek Orr, Director of the District of Columbia Office of Disability Rights. Thank you for the honor and privilege to appear before you today to report on our agency's performance in Fiscal Year 2009 and thus far in Fiscal Year 2010.

The Office of Disability Rights (ODR) began operations in mid-November 2007 with a mission to ensure that the programs, services, benefits, activities and facilities operated or funded by the District of Columbia are fully accessible to, and useable by, people with disabilities. ODR is responsible for ensuring that District government is in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and other federal and District disability rights laws. To accomplish this mission, we provide training, technical assistance, policy recommendations, expertise and informal dispute resolution to District agencies, consumers and residents with disabilities and other stakeholders. Our vision is for the District of Columbia to be a national model city of accessibility for people with disabilities. ODR accomplishes this work through a staff of nine (9) and through close coordination with other District agencies. Presently, five ODR staff identify as

having a disability as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The most recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 49.7 million Americans have a disability; this is a ratio of nearly 1-in-5 U.S. residents, or 19 percent of the population. In the District of Columbia, this data indicates that there are approximately 116,000 residents with disabilities serving and living in the community – roughly 20% of the population of the District of Columbia.

For people with disabilities in the District, the prospect for sustained change is better today than ever before. The establishment of the Office of Disability Rights has greatly advanced the recognition that discrimination on the basis of disability / is a violation of the inherent dignity and worth of the person; the diversity of persons with disabilities; and the importance of individual autonomy and independence, including the freedom to make their own choices, for all persons.

In July of this year, our nation will recognize and celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This landmark civil rights legislation guarantees equal opportunity for people with disabilities in public accommodations, commercial facilities, employment, transportation, state and local government services and telecommunications. I am proud to report today that District Government has made tremendous progress in meeting the spirit and intent of the ADA by improving the overall quality and accessibility of services, programs, and activities provided to consumers and residents with disabilities.

**In Fiscal 2009, the Office of Disability Rights accomplished the following:**

To improve the accessibility of District Government facilities and programs, during FY 2009 ODR:

- Worked with the Department of Real Estate Services (DRES) to accomplish capital improvements to District Government facilities to enhance ADA access. Priorities for FY 2009 included police facilities, homeless shelters, sidewalks, polling places, public libraries, public recreation facilities, and schools. The capital dollars for these projects were provided by ODR's Accessibility Funding Pool. In addition, ODR provided technical assistance to enhance accessibility to 70 District Government facilities, leased, owned or under development.
  
- Collaborated with 24 DC Government Agencies to complete ADA Self-Assessments. The assessment guides each agency on prioritizing improvements to enhance accessibility of how and where they provide activities, programs and services. ODR's goal was to complete 40 plans in FY 2009, but with support from ODR, Agencies completed and submitted 108 ADA Self-Assessments this past fiscal year.
  
- Worked collaboratively with the Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO) to improve website and technology accessibility. In FY 2009, 66% of District Government web designers/editors (46 individuals)

received Section 508 web accessibility training and 16 agency websites were evaluated for compliance. In addition, ODR's review determined that at least 95% of all the non-text items in the DC.GOV portal and agency main websites have text equivalents and at least 60% of website videos, audio files, documents and forms are accessible to people with vision and hearing disabilities.

- Implemented a city-wide centralized contract for the provision of Sign Language Interpretation services for Deaf residents and consumers attempting to access District Government Programs and Services. In FY 2009, this initiative resulted in 389 requests for services being provided. For the provision of Real-Time Captioning Services, ODR has identified a local vendor and requests for this method of effective communication have been successfully provided.
  
- Implemented a centralized funding mechanism to assist employees and their respective agencies identify the appropriate reasonable accommodation equipment, software, etc. needed by the employee. In addition to the purchases made, ODR developed a "Reasonable Accommodation" planning process to use with each employee. The goal of this centralized approach is to promote practices that expand the hiring of people with disabilities.

ODR also significantly expanded its training and technical assistance activities this past fiscal year. Our major accomplishments included:

- Provided training to 960 District Government employees and contractors on ADA Title I; ADA Title II; Disability Sensitivity; Deaf Culture; Effective Communication; Hypothermia Driver Practices with Regards People with Disabilities and the Fair Housing Act. This performance is more than **twice** ODR's goal of training 400 employees and contractors on these issues during FY 2009. Per ODR's surveys, participants were highly satisfied with the materials provided / and the learning platform utilized. To ensure that the continued educational needs of the 40+ ADA Coordinators are met, ODR implemented a survey tool that collected data on the ADA Coordinators' experience and the level of training and technical assistance required. This data will be utilized to determine effective methods for addressing their training needs and on-going technical assistance.

Provided technical assistance, informal complaint resolution and information and referral services to 402 visitors, residents, consumers, District government staff and other interested individuals on issues and concerns related to the ADA, Fair Housing Act, and guidance on how to achieve needed services. Requests for this service can be

telephone. A tracking mechanism for the impact the ODR technical assistance, informal complaint resolution and information and referral services has on OHR' level of service has been initiated on a pilot basis and remains in development with full implementation to occur in FY 2010.

these needs.

- Released the "DC Government Manual for Accommodating Employees with Disabilities." This Manual was provided to all District Government Agencies, is posted on the ODR website and is distributed to all persons attending a DCHR new employee orientation as well as all persons attending an ODR training program.

**Other noteworthy accomplishments during the past year include:**

- Collaborated with the Council of Governments (COG) and the DC Taxi Commission to bring twenty (20) Accessible Taxi's into the District under a "New Freedom" grant initiative from the Federal Government. ODR's role was specific to participation on the planning committee to provide technical assistance and guidance in the development of the project. Twenty accessible taxis will now be in operation in the District.
- Conducted an anonymous email-based survey on disability employment practices within the District Government to assess the

hiring, accommodation and retention practices of District Government employees with disabilities. The results of the data have been summarized and ODR continues to work with DCHR on how to best utilize the recommendations associated with this project.

- Partnering with over 40 consumers, advocates, care-givers, providers and DC Government Agencies, ODR coordinated the development of an Olmstead Community Integration Plan entitled "DC: One Community for All." The goal of this plan is to achieve greater opportunities for people with disabilities to exercise self-determination and live in their communities. Technical Assistance with this Plan's development was provided via a grant from the Bazelon Center for Mental Health. The plan, which includes quantifiable performance goals, will be finalized in the few weeks and released to the community. Quarterly meetings of all interested stakeholders will be held to review the status of the plan .integration.
  
- In October, coordinated the District's 2009 Disability Awareness Conference in October, which brought together over 200 members of the disability community and DC government officials to develop strategies to improve services in the areas of employment, housing, assistive technologies, and personal care supports.

- Coordinated “Disability Mentoring Days”. 36 District agencies and City Council members hosted 42 students and job seekers with disabilities for a day of job-shadowing and mentoring throughout October.
  
- Assumed the role of “Fair Housing Act Compliance Officer” for DCRA to monitor the request and approval process for District residents when seeking an accommodation under the Fair Housing Act.
  
- Through the 2009 DC Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) a team of ten youths worked conducted surveys of sidewalks and curb ramps of bus stops and Metro stops that provide access to DC government buildings and services. The results of the surveys have been shared with DDOT and will provide technical assistance when determining a priority list of accessible entrances and paths of travel for enhanced accessibility.

In FY '10, ODR has planned aggressively to capitalize on the lessons we have learned and the impressive gains we have made in pursuit of our mission.

Some of our major goals for this current fiscal year include:

- Continuing our work with DRES and DCRA to improve the accessibility of District government facilities, by developing an approval chain process for capital projects that includes ODR review.

- Expanding our outreach and education beyond District ADA coordinators to educate grantees, contractors and employees more broadly on disability rights and education.
- Working with agencies to ensure ADA compliance plans are implemented.
- Implementing a procedure for the translation of government documents into Braille and other accessible formats, such as large print, at no cost to the agency.
- As the Designated State Agency for the Developmental Disabilities Council, / support the successful transition of the Council to ODR and ensure the goals and objectives of the Council's 5 year strategic plan enhances the lives of people with intellectual disabilities.

In conclusion, on behalf of the staff of the Office of Disability Rights we thank the Council and Community partners for their support and commitment to the mission, vision and values of the Agency. This concludes my formal testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you have.