TO COMPLIANCE . . . AND BEYOND

DENVER DIVISION OF DISABILITY RIGHTS

2022 ANNUAL REPORT
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A Note from HRCP’s Executive Director, Derek Okubo

The Division of Disability Rights (“Disability Rights”) has come a long way since July 2011 when Mayor Michael B. Hancock was elected, and he appointed me to serve as the Agency for Human Rights and Community Partnerships (HRCP) new Executive Director. At that time, the Office of Disability Rights was a one-person office. To ensure accessibility and ADA compliance for Denver residents over the subsequent years, I enthusiastically supported the office’s growth to become a division with eight dedicated staff members. In 12 years, the staff has grown to now include a division director, architects, plan reviewers, ADA inspectors, a project manager, and program evaluators and coordinators who are passionate about disability rights and serving our community. This growth could not have occurred without the foresight of HRCP staff and the unending support of Mayor Hancock who shared our commitment toward residents living with disabilities and demonstrated that support through not just words, but actions. In so doing, the Mayor proved he truly meant what he said in 2011 when he emphasized that his administration would focus on creating a world-class city where everyone matters. As my term leading HRCP nears its end, I am proud that together with the Division of Disability Rights and our community, the connection between disability rights and human rights has never been truer.

Derek Okubo
Agency for Human Rights & Community Partnerships (HRCP)

Meet the Division of Disability Rights Director, Alison Butler

I am so excited to be the new Director of the Division of Disability Rights! I have spent my career as a lawyer fighting to uphold the civil and human rights of all people, but I always found myself drawn to disability justice. While society generally accepts that it is discriminatory to exclude people based on their race or gender, for some reason the same does not hold true for people with disabilities. When there are stairs at an entrance of a building, too often we look for excuses. “Is this an old building?” “Is there another entrance in the back?” or “It would be really expensive to fix this.” The field of disability rights does not accept these excuses and looks to not only eliminate physical barriers, but attitudinal barriers as well. And it was this promise to do better that led me to leave the practice of law and join the amazing team in Human Rights and Community Partnerships. I am so grateful to be a part of an agency that so values disability rights that they hired me – a civil rights attorney with a disability who filed a lawsuit against the city on behalf of clients with disabilities. The City of Denver - and Derek Okubo - have truly shown their commitment to full inclusion and I’m proud to showcase some of the amazing work we have done over the last year. Our job is not done and there is always more for us to learn, but there are plenty of reasons to feel good about the direction we are going.

Alison Butler, Esq.
Division of Disability Rights, HRCP
A Brief History of the Disability Rights Movement

The journey to equity for people with disabilities is a long and winding road, and it’s still being built. Here’s a brief look of some of the most important moments and legal developments from the Disability Rights Movement over the last century.

1927
The U.S. Supreme Court decides *Buck v. Bell* upholding the forced sterilization of institutionalized people with disabilities.

1958
Colorado enacts the **Colorado Anti-Discrimination Act (CADA)**, prohibiting discrimination based on membership in certain protected classes—people with disabilities are not included.

1964
Congress passes the **Civil Rights Act**, a broad sweeping civil rights law prohibiting discrimination based on membership in certain protected classes—people with disabilities are not included.

1972
Geraldo Rivera exposes the deplorable conditions that thousands of people are living in at Willowbrook Institute in New York. This leads Congress to discuss increasing federal protections for people with disabilities.

1973
Congress enacts **The Rehabilitation Act**, with Section 504 prohibiting discrimination against people with disabilities by entities receiving federal funding, but the law contains no enforcement mechanism.

1975
Colorado amends the **CADA**, adding protections against discrimination for people with physical disabilities.

1977
Frustrated by the lack of enforcement in Section 504, disability advocates in San Francisco staged the largest peaceful takeover of a federal building, leading to the new presidential administration signing the Section 504 regulations.
A group of Denver-based disability activists blocks the intersection of Colfax and Broadway to protest their inability to ride city busses. They are known as the Gang of 19 and their action leads Denver to become the first city with fully accessible public transportation.

Following the Capital Crawl, during which disability advocates crawled up the steps to the U.S. Capital, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is passed providing true protection of the rights of people with disabilities in the areas of employment, state and local government services, public accommodations and in various other settings.

The U.S. Supreme Court decides *L.C. v. Olmstead*, holding that states must work to provide services for people with disabilities in the community, rather than relying on institutions.

In response to courts attempting to limit its scope, Congress amends the ADA, broadening its protections.

Denver Mayor Michael B. Hancock signs Executive Order 147 *Compliance with and Implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act* reinforcing the City's commitment to ensuring full compliance with the ADA.

The United States, Colorado, and Denver are continuing to work to build full inclusivity for people with disabilities. To compliance...and beyond!

To learn more about the disability rights movement, watch the Denver Office of Storytelling's Emmy-nominated film, *I Am Denver* [https://tinyurl.com/4dbyynps](https://tinyurl.com/4dbyynps)
Up to 1 in 4 (nearly 26%) of adults self-identify as having some type of disability.

3.0% of adults have a self-care disability with difficulty dressing or bathing.¹

11.1% of adults have a mobility disability with serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs.¹

5.7% of adults are deaf or have serious difficulty hearing.¹

10.9% of adults have a cognition disability with serious difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions.¹

6.4% of adults have an independent living disability with difficulty doing errands alone.¹

21.3% of adults with a disability are currently employed, compared to 65.4% of non-disabled adults.²

25% of Americans with disabilities live at or below the federal poverty line.³

4.9% of adults have a vision disability with blindness or serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses.¹
DID YOU KNOW?

The majority of people with disabilities do not have a **visible disability.** This means that they do not use mobility devices, like crutches or wheelchairs, nor have an obvious physical disability, like a limb difference.

**Invisible disabilities** are more common than you might expect. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, it is estimated that more than 1 in 5 adults lives with a mental health condition that may qualify as a disability. Other invisible disabilities can include cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and seizure disorder, just to name a few.

**Sources**

2. https://www.bls.gov/news.release/disabl.nr0.htm
4. https://data.census.gov/table?t=Disability&g=040XX00US08_050XX00US08031&tid=ACSST1Y2021.S1810
The Division of Disability Rights is a part of the Mayor’s Agency for Human Rights and Community Partnerships. The agency has a rich history rooted in the ideal of anti-discrimination. It was created in 1947 when Denver elected J. Quigg Newton as its new mayor, ousting Benjamin F. Stapleton, a known member of the Ku Klux Klan. Mayor Newton was committed to addressing the racial discrimination perpetuated by former Mayor Stapleton and so he formed the Agency for Human Rights to study and recommend solutions to the racial injustices in Denver. Not surprisingly, the agency found widespread discrimination across all levels of government services and found that many prominent government appointees, including the Chief of Police, were members of the Klan. Supported by the information and recommendations from the Agency for Human Rights, Mayor Newton set out to make changes in Denver.

Fast forward nearly 75 years and the agency has grown significantly and has supported every mayor since Mayor Newton. As of 2022, the agency, now called Human Rights and Community Partnerships (HRCP), contains eight offices and ten citizen commissions. HRCP works to elevate the voices of immigrants, older people, the LGBTQ+ community, Native Americans, people with disabilities, and others, to the mayor and all city agencies. These offices and commissions also provide services such as sign language, Communication Access Realtime Translation Service (CART), financial empowerment, nonprofit engagement, and more. HRCP is a relatively small agency, but they are proud to be an integral partner in helping Denver realize its commitment to being an equitable, inclusive, and diverse world-city where everyone matters.
Our Mission

To partner with city agencies and the disability community to ensure equitable access to city services, facilities, and programs.

Our Vision

To compliance...and beyond!

At the Division for Disability Rights, we live by these values every day, and ground ourselves in the notions of accessibility, inclusivity, and acceptance. We continue to look beyond legal compliance and ask ourselves how we can truly build accessibility and inclusion for all. We often ask ourselves and our partners, “What does it matter if you can get in the front door if you don’t feel welcome once you come inside?”

We focus on the following areas to help Denver be accessible to all:

• Advise, train, and provide technical assistance on disability issues to city agencies
• Work directly with the disability community to gather input and respond to disability-related grievances
• Review construction plans for ADA compliance and universal design

If you have a disability-related grievance about a city of Denver facility or program, let us know! We are here to help.

Email disabilityaccess@denvergov.org or https://tinyurl.com/yjjbzhp2.
2022 at Disability Rights

BY THE NUMBERS

150

Number of questions, grievances, and requests for resources from residents and visitors of Denver that the Division of Disability Rights team responded to in 2022.

900

Number of architectural plans reviewed by our team to ensure that both City and private businesses are building and renovating in ways that are compliant with the ADA Accessibility Guidelines.

800+

The number of City of Denver staff and community members we trained on disability-related topics. Our training topics include service animals, architectural barriers, effective interactions with people with disabilities, how to provide reasonable accommodations, and more.

300

Number of City public-facing programs and services evaluated for ADA Title II compliance and accessibility barriers in 2022.
Number of architectural barriers remediated in City facilities and parks to meet, or exceed, federal, state and local codes and standards.

Number of skilled inspections performed at City facilities to evaluate compliance with the ADA Accessibility Guidelines.

Number of requests for technical assistance received from City and County of Denver agencies interested in ensuring their buildings, facilities and programs are fully accessible and inclusive. We responded to them all!

Number of in-person and virtual community meetings our team held in 2022, reaching nearly 100 members of Denver's disability community.

Number of grocery gift cards our team distributed to older and disabled residents of our local Volunteers of America affordable housing complex.
We Value Our Partners

Our work is challenging and we could not do it alone. In 2022, we were lucky to partner with many city agencies and organizations across the City and County of Denver.

For example, in June, we worked with Denver’s Office of Special Events (OSE) and the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure (DOTI), in partnership with the Colorado Avalanche, to make sure the Stanley Cup Parade and Avs Rally were fully accessible for people with disabilities. It was a huge success!

We also worked diligently with Red Rocks Parks and Amphitheatre staff and members of the community to ensure that necessary structural changes at Red Rocks did not decrease opportunities for people with disabilities to enjoy this spectacular event center. We culminated this work with a celebration at Red Rocks in early November.

These are just a few examples of our community involvement! Overall, we collaborated with members of the following agencies throughout 2022 to make Denver a more accessible place to live, work, and thrive.
COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

- 16th Street Mall Project
- Atlantis Community
- Colorado Cross Disability Coalition
- Denver Regional Mobility and Access Council
- Disability Law Colorado
- Domino Service Dogs
- Fox & Robertson
- JFK Partners
- State Independent Living Council
- The Arc of Colorado
- Volunteers of America

CITY AND COUNTY OF DENVER AGENCIES

- Arts and Venues Department
- Climate Action, Sustainability, and Resiliency
- Community Planning and Development
- Denver Anti-Discrimination Office
- Denver Board of Adjustments
- Denver City Attorney’s Office
- Denver Commission for People with Disabilities
- Denver Department of Excise and Licenses
- Denver Department of Finance
- Denver Economic Development & Opportunity
- Denver Fire Department
- Denver Human Services
- Denver International Airport
- Denver Parks and Recreation
- Denver Police Department
- Denver Public Library
- Denver Sheriff Department
- Department of Public Health and Environment
- Department of Transportation and Infrastructure
- General Services
- IDDEAS
- Office of Aging
- Office of Children’s Affairs
- Office of Emergency Management
- Office of Financial Empowerment & Protection
- Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs
- Office of Nonprofit Engagement
- Office of Sign Language Services
- Office of Social Equity and Innovation
- Office of Special Events
- Office of Storytelling
- Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre
- Technology Services Creative Services
- Technology Services
STAFF HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2022

RO-TIEN LIANG
In 2022, my proudest accomplishment is expanding my horizon on disability rights. Being exposed to different roles outside of my trained responsibilities, I was able to better understand this work from a humanistic side of disability rights, in addition to the technical requirements. It has opened new doors, so that I can contribute beyond my comfort zone.

KRISTINA ERICSON
2022 was exciting! I rescued a wolfhound (Moxie) from Florida, and organized the third annual Adaptive Climbers’ Festival (ACF) - the first physically accessible climbing festival for climbers with disabilities - in October. I also explored much of the Western U.S. in 2022 doing some of my favorite things: snowboarding, backpacking, rock climbing, diving, and kayaking.

JUAN PASILLAS
A highlight of 2022 for me was the Stanley Cup parade, where I helped members of our community see the Colorado Avalanche players hoist the Stanley Cup from a dedicated accessible viewing area that we helped create. I also went to a concert at Red Rocks Amphitheater (my first in many years) with my fellow Disability Rights team. Excitingly, my family welcomed a new member: our little puppy “Luna”. She is a Chihuahua/Poodle mix, and we are excited to have her.
MEGAN CATAFOLMO

Last year, I got to utilize my project management (PM) skills on and off the field. By creating and managing fundraisers and obtaining a Bike Multiple Sclerosis (MS) team sponsor, I was able to raise more money for the fight against MS than ever before, and the world was gifted the first ever known cause of MS. That puts us one step closer to a cure, and I can't think of a better way to use my PM skills! Win, win!

JEREMY MCKINNON

In 2022, I enjoyed spending time with Bailey, a beautiful German Shepard, who I adopted in 2021 from the Denver Animal Shelter. I was able to complete some remodeling projects at my house, and I volunteered and donated to some nonprofits throughout the year.

SPENCER POCOCK

2022 was quite the transitional year for me as I was hired and began my plans review position with the City. Moving to a new city and changing jobs is always a stressful time, but Denver is a great location to explore, and I am loving the new types of information and perspectives the position is exposing me to.

JOAN LABELLE

The disability acceptance video that the team created was one of the most gratifying experiences for me in 2022. It was fun -the writing I got to do, the directing, going from words on a page to the visual of the videotaping. It brought back lots of fond memories from my community theatre days!
Denver is consistently recognized as one of the most accessible cities in the nation. This is hard earned praise, but the work is far from done. There are many physical, programmatic, and attitudinal barriers that still exist, and Denver is committed to doing the work to knock down these barriers. We are proud to be a part of Denver’s journey.

Here are some of the things the Division of Disability Rights is committed to focusing on in 2023.

**Physical and Programmatic Barriers**

Denver has committed toremedying 1,656 physical barriers by 2025 and has plans in place to remedy another 14,000 barriers in the coming years. Our division is proud to partner with all city agencies to help them implement their barrier removal plans and provide ADA inspections for quality control. To further this work and provide transparency to the community, in 2023 the Division will be finalizing its updated ADA Transition Plan that will include not only physical, but also programmatic, barriers that exist and the City’s plan to fix them.
Collaboration with City Agencies

We look forward to working with city agencies in 2023 to help them navigate the complex world of disability justice, share available community and city resources, and truly learn to accept and appreciate people with disabilities. One exciting project we are working on is a 30-minute video on disability acceptance that features some of our favorite Denver residents and visitors. We look forward to the big screening coming later this year!

Building Trust with the Community

The Division of Disability Rights is eager to continue building trust and collaboration with our valued disability community. We look forward to our community town halls, neighborhood trainings, and attending community events. Two of our staff will be presenting at the ADA National Symposium in Kansas City in May – we are excited to connect with members of the disability community from across the country. We are also launching a new program “Good Access is Good Business” to help recognize private businesses in Denver that are working hard to be disability friendly.
WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

There are many ways to get involved with the Division of Disability Rights. Community collaboration is critical to helping us make Denver accessible to all, and we hope that you can join us in this effort!

1. **Attend a Town Hall Meeting**
   The Division of Disability Rights hosts a quarterly Town Hall meeting to hear directly from the disability community. Join us on zoom the first Tuesday of the month in March, June, September, and December.

2. **Join the Denver Commission for People with Disabilities (DCPD)**
   The DCPD is a City Council-approved, citizen’s group for disability advocates who live or work in Denver. Commissioners advise the Mayor on disability-related matters, and meet 1-3 times per month to discuss important issues.

3. **Schedule a Training**
   Our staff members regularly speak to community groups and city agencies about the rights of people with disabilities. Want to learn about service animals, disability acceptance, ADA architectural requirements, or other disability issues? Give us a call!

4. **Find Us at an Event**
   We love to work with our community. If you see us around, introduce yourself! You can find us at Denver Days, Light the Lights, and many other events. Don’t be a stranger!

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**Join a DCPD Meeting**
The DCPD meets virtually from 5:30pm – 7pm, on the first Tuesday of every month.

For Zoom details, and to learn more, go to [bit.ly/DenverCommissionForPWD](bit.ly/DenverCommissionForPWD)

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**Join a Town Hall Meeting**
Meetings are held virtually on the first Tuesday of March, June, September, and December from 4:00- 5:30.

For Zoom details, and to learn more, send an email to [DisabilityAccess@denvergov.org](mailto:DisabilityAccess@denvergov.org)
THANK YOU FOR A GREAT YEAR!