

## Dear NYC Mayoral Candidates

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It's a Mayoral election year in NYC and we're keeping watch very closely. There's no shortage of candidates and we have a message for each and every one; people with disabilities matter and people with disabilities vote. We'd like to give you some advice and ask you some questions. We want to raise problems, but also propose solutions.

There are one million people with disabilities in New York City, but you wouldn't know that by the way the city is set up. Time and time again talks to ensure civil rights law implementation to remove barriers to full participation through discussion fails. That is when people with disabilities advocate and seek legal remedies to ensure that City agencies behave in a lawful manner.

Schools are failing students with disabilities. They don't provide services required for students with disabilities by law. Many schools are not accessible. When schools segregate - have inaccessible school facilities that exclude teachers with disabilities as well as students they are not promoting "school choice" or excellence in learning for any student. When will this be a priority?

When schools fail people with disabilities, the failure falls hardest on Black and Latino/a/x students. These students with disabilities benefit more than other students in terms of job prospects and learning when they attain educational credentials.

People with disabilities face lower rates of employment (29%) than their nondisabled counterparts. We tend to be concentrated in bottom rung, low-wage jobs with lack of opportunity to advance. We are concentrated in some industries and others don't really seek candidates with disabilities. Lack of educational attainment, accessible transportation, and discrimination are to blame. But so is a lack of interest on the part of the City's top leaders on finding solutions that can have a large impact - like requiring agencies to hire qualified candidates with disabilities and City contractors to seek to attain a goal of 14 percent in employment of qualified people with disabilities with their taxpayer dollars.

Lack of accessible transportation in New York City impedes equal access to school, work, health care, civic participation and family life. For decades we've worked to get the MTA to become compliant with the ADA State and City Human Rights laws. Accessibility is more than elevators and ramps. It's visual and audio accessibility. It is access for people with cognitive and intellectual disabilities and mental health disabilities. It's paratransit. It's sidewalks and curb cuts. It's affordable access to transportation. We would love to know how the next administration plans to handle this vital issue.

People with disabilities are disproportionately poor, lack sufficient access to food and are less likely to be able to use public sources of food help because of accessibility problems. Poverty programs that the City operates create new ways of reaching people, including kiosks and robocalls that are inaccessible to some people with disabilities and have to be retrofitted to make them accessible after advocacy by the community. Why aren't the questions about whether the new program designs will work for everyone asked at the start?

People with disabilities are much more likely to be rent burdened--unable to afford their rent and are at least 60 percent of the homeless population in shelters. Where are people with disabilities who are extremely low income and need accessible housing on the City's agenda?

People with disabilities are disproportionately likely to have negative encounters with the police and the criminal justice system. Police stations are inaccessible, lack hearing loops, need materials in alternate formats. When encountering people with mental health disabilities or intellectual disabilities or who are Deaf, the police tend to see dangerous people rather than people who navigate the world differently. When is the bias in these systems going to change? When will the rights of people with disabilities be taken into consideration?

People with disabilities are a health-disparities population. We find roadblocks to healthcare everywhere that we go to seek care - in health care facilities; in the lack of communication readiness; in inflexible appointment schedules and more. Even in building the vaccine rollout, home visits to people who are homebound were not on the agenda, captioning and alternate formats and ASL were still in the future, we hope. Why would you leave out people with disabilities who are often far more likely to be at higher risk for COVID-19 because of a higher incidence of co-morbid conditions?

There are so many wonderful public spaces, but not all can be fully enjoyed by everyone and some are segregated. Libraries and tech centers are newly built for millions and millions of dollars and are inaccessible. We need to ensure that public spaces and institutions are accessible to all. How can new segregated complexes continue to be built by the City when they are supposed to serve all equally?

We must be part of the conversation around these and other topics, not a footnote. We are New Yorkers and we love this city. Let's work together to make sure that this is a city for all. Will you assertively address these issues together with us? Hire people with disabilities throughout your administration? Say the word disability in your campaign? Refrain from thinking of us as pitiable or heroic - but just as folks?

Will you require that all new projects consider how they will design programs or other interventions that are accessible to all? Will you run an administration that would rather work with the community than wait until we sue and then fight on the wrong side of the law time and time again?

And to the readers of *Able Newspaper*, reach out to the 2021 NYC Mayoral candidates and tell them your thoughts and concerns. Ask them to work with the community and remind them "nothing about us without us."