



CT State Independent
Living Council

151 New Park Avenue, c/o NCAAA #75, Hartford, CT 06106

March 20, 2023

Via Electronic Delivery

Jim Tamburro
Executive Director
Office of Legislative Management
300 Capitol Avenue, Rm 5100
Hartford, CT 06106

Re: Accommodations for People with Disabilities to Participate in Legislative Process

Dear Mr. Tamburro:

Thank you for your February 17, 2023 reply to my letter regarding access issues for people with disabilities at the Legislative Office Building. Your responses, however, reflect a very limited view of the accessibility required for individuals with disabilities to participate in the legislative process: accessibility that focuses on facilities access and sign language interpreters. It does not, however, address the overall programmatic accessibility to the legislative process and the barriers to people with disabilities who need accommodations that will allow them to testify and participate in other legislative activities. The process to request an accommodation is cumbersome at best and violates the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Since the receipt of your letter, people with disabilities have continued to experience barriers to participation. A few of examples include:

- At a recent committee hearing, a sign language interpreter refused to continue providing sign language after declaring that she had only been there to sign for two individuals. Other members of the Deaf community would have been denied the ability to testify if another individual, who was not a certified sign language interpreter, had not stepped in to assist. It is worth noting that sign language interpreters are hired for a minimum two-hour time block and would have been within that time frame if they had stayed to assist other Deaf individuals who were present to testify or just listen to testimony.

- An individual contacted a committee clerk for disability-related accommodations. The clerk was not aware of the process of accommodation and had to contact other clerks for information about the process. Each committee handles accommodations differently, requiring a call to each committee clerk when a person with a disability wishes to testify. The lack of a structured process is a discriminatory barrier that denies people with disabilities access to the programs and services of the Connecticut Legislature.
- A group of individuals who use wheelchairs requested accommodations from one of the committee clerks. The group was told that they could not sit in the hearing room because there wasn't enough space for their wheelchairs. They would have to sit in another room to watch the hearing and wait to provide testimony. This is unacceptable discriminatory segregation that violates the requirements, purpose, and intent of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

While the members of the CT Cross Disability Lifespan Alliance appreciated your prompt response, it does not fully address our requests in my previous letter, and we reiterate them here:

1. **Hire an Americans with Disabilities Act or Accommodations Coordinator** – It is not sufficient to refer people with disabilities to Brian Lencz, the facilities coordinator. The Legislature needs one ADA Coordinator who can work with both the facilities staff and the committees to effectively address ADA-related issues and accommodation requests.
2. **Develop an Accommodations Policy and Procedure that Must be Followed by all Legislative Staff for Any Legislative Events.**
3. **Require the Coordinator and at least 2 backup Staff to Receive Training**
4. **Legislative Staff Training** – An initial orientation training for staff and at least annually thereafter.
5. **Publicize the Accommodations Process and Contact Information for the Coordinator.**
6. **Supervision of the Coordinator** - In addition, Legislative Management should identify who the Coordinator will report to in the event of any issues.

Your reply does not address the full scope of the accommodations necessary to provide accessibility to the Legislature's programs and activities. People with disabilities are constituents too and it is critical for their voices to be heard.

Members of the Alliance and I would like to meet with you to discuss our request. We understand that it is a busy time of year, but the Legislature cannot continue to deny access to people with disabilities. Please let us know when we can arrange such a meeting, in person or via zoom, in the next week to ten days.

Sincerely,

Molly Cole

Executive Director, Connecticut State Independent Living Council Coordinator, CT
Cross Disability Lifespan Alliance