



The Connecticut Cross Disability Lifespan Alliance

c/o CT State Independent Living Council, 151 New Park Avenue, NCAAA #75, Hartford, CT 06106
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April 19, 2023

To: Rep. Matthew Ritter
Rep. Jason Rojas
Rep. Vincent Candelora
Sen. Martin Looney
Sen. Kevin Kelly

Re: Request to Meet with Organizations Representing People with Disabilities to Address Systemic Failures by Legislature in Accommodating Our Members

Dear Speaker Ritter, Representatives Rojas and Candelora and Senators Looney and Kelly:

Our organizations are members of the Connecticut Cross Disability Lifespan Alliance. The Alliance, through its Coordinator, Molly Cole, reached out to Jim Tamburro at the Office of Legislative Management in three separate letters dated January 28, 2023, February 14, 2023, and March 20, 2023. The Alliance asked for policy changes to address ongoing denials of requests for individualized accommodations for people with disabilities, as required by Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Ms. Cole received only one reply, which rebuffed the Alliance's suggestions and did not offer an opportunity to meet to discuss the issues, as Ms. Cole had requested.

The Alliance's letters requested the Office of Legislative Management:

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 All Legislative Events.**
3. **Require the Coordinator and at least two backup Staff to Receive Training on Title II of the ADA and the Accommodations Policy and Procedures Developed in Response to #2, above.**
4. **Provide Legislative Staff Training**
5. **Publicize the Accommodations Process and Contact Information for the Coordinator.**
6. **Provide Supervision of the Coordinator** - In addition, Legislative Management should Identify who the Coordinator will report to in the event of any issues.

None of these requests were agreed to or even addressed, and even requests for a meeting were rebuffed.

The Office of Legislative Management continued to violate the rights of people with disabilities. Ms. Cole, on behalf of the Alliance, was therefore forced to file four separate civil rights complaints against the Office of Legislative Management with the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division. These complaints alleged more than four specific instances of failure to provide accommodations to individuals with disabilities who were seeking to participate in the legislative process.

In addition, Ms. Cole sent a letter dated March 28, 2023, addressed directly to each of you as the members of the Joint Legislative Management Committee. The letter summarized these complaints, asked for action and, at a minimum, requested that your committee "instruct Mr. Tamburro to meet with us immediately and develop a plan to address these issues." The Alliance received an acknowledgement of receipt of the March 28th letter from Mr. Tamburro.

We fully support the six "asks" made repeatedly by the Alliance, as stated above. These actions are necessary because each committee handles accommodations differently and the lack of a structured and consistent process is a discriminatory barrier that denies people with disabilities access to the legislative process. However, at a bare minimum, a meeting is necessary to see if there might be common ground with alternative solutions which will have the same result of ending the long-standing pattern of denials of the rights of people of disabilities seeking to participate in the legislative process. If successful, that could also result in the withdrawal of the four complaints.

Please respond to Ms. Cole by no later than Friday, April 21st, with potential dates that will work for Mr. Tamburro and at least one of you from each chamber, so that we can try to find acceptable solutions to this long-standing problem.

If you continue to ignore this reasonable request, we will have no choice but to instruct our members that, in the future, whenever a request for a reasonable accommodation is denied -- which we expect will continue to be a regular occurrence absent adoption of at least some of the six demands — they should immediately file a complaint with the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice. In that event, we also will provide them with technical assistance so they can promptly get these complaints before the Civil Rights Division every time there is such a violation.

We would, of course, much rather pursue a cooperative approach, as envisioned by the ADA. It is quite possible that there are other ways of addressing the concerns of people with disabilities being denied their rights. This can be explored if you agree to a meeting with people with lived experience who have attempted to obtain accommodations at the legislature. The Joint Committee's unwillingness to even provide the courtesy of a meeting to try to work this out would mean that federal complaints against the legislature will unfortunately have to become routine.

Thank you for your attention to this important request. We look forward to hearing from you, through Ms. Cole by Friday. You may reach her at 860-849-0686 or molly@ctsilc.org.

Respectfully,

Jordan Fairchild, Executive Director
Keep the Promise Coalition

Thomas Burr
Public Policy & Affiliates Relations Manager
NAMI CT

Julie Peters, CBIS
Executive Director
Brain Injury Alliance of CT

Kathy Flaherty
Executive Director
Connecticut Legal Rights Project

Carol Scully
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CT State Independent Living Council

Bev Kidder
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Citizens Coalition for Equal Access

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Eileen Healy
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Deborah Dorfman
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Luis Perez
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Access Independence

Luisa Gasco-Soboleski, President
Connecticut Association of the Deaf

