COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

COMMITTEE ON PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

AND SPECIAL NEEDS

Room 400, City Hall
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Tuesday, October 7, 2025
1:11 p.m.

PRESENT:

COUNCILWOMAN KENDRA BROOKS, CHAIR
COUNCILMAN JIM HARRITY, VICE-CHAIR
COUNCILWOMAN CINDY BASS
COUNCILWOMAN KATHERINE GILMORE RICHARDSON
COUNCILWOMAN RUE LANDAU
COUNCILMAN ISAIAH THOMAS

RESOLUTION: 250753

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COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS:

Good afternoon. I now note that the hour has come.

Mr. Varghese, will you please call the roll to take attendance. Members that are in attendance will please indicate that they are present when your name is called.

THE CLERK: Minority Leader Brooks.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS:

Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Jim Harrity.

COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Thomas.

COUNCILMAN THOMAS:

Present.

THE CLERK:

Councilmember Bass.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS:
Present.
THE CLERK:
Councilmember Gilmore Richardson.
(No response.)
THE CLERK:
Councilmember Landau.
COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:
Present.
COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS:
Thank you. A quorum of the Committee is present and this hearing is now called to order. This is the public hearing of the Committee on -- of the Committee on People with Disabilities and Special Needs regarding Resolution No. 250753.
Mr. Varghese, will you please read the title of the resolution.
THE CLERK: Resolution No. 250753, authorizing the Committee on People with

Disabilities and Special Needs to hold a hearing on the City's progress preparing to accommodate individuals with disabilities for the historic programming taking place in 2026 in the City of Philadelphia.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you, Mr. Varghese.

I will start off with some remarks. Good afternoon, and thank you all for being here today for this public hearing of the Committee on People with Disabilities. This year we are celebrating the 35th anniversary of the signing of American with Disabilities Act. The ADA prohibits discrimination and segregation in public places and it is won by a movement of people fighting to be seen and heard by their government.

America has a long

history of treating people with disabilities as less than human. For decades people with disabilities have been organizing, educating and advocating for fair treatment. And while we have made some progress, there is still so much to do.

Two years ago I led an effort in Council to change the Charter to make sure the Office for People with Disabilities is permanent because I know how important it is to ensure accessibility is woven into all aspects of city function. I know from decades of working with people with the disability community that accessibility in our public spaces is often an afterthought, if even considered at all. And I see that discrimination against people with disabilities continues to be widely accepted in city government.

We would never tolerate a public space that said no women allowed, no Black people allowed and yet we frequently tolerate public spaces that are impossible for people with disabilities to access. The City Hall subway station is a perfect example. There is no way for someone using a wheelchair to come to City Hall by subway. City Hall itself is often challenging for people who use wheelchairs to navigate. And while this isn't one person's fault, we need to all do better to proactively making spaces accessible. That is why this conversation is important.

As a city, we are spending a lot of time and a lot of money this year to make sure we are prepared for the major events of 2026. We are expecting millions of visitors and a $2.5 billion

economic impact. We want to be ready for the spotlight. So we're investing over 120 million in public funding to prepare. The energy and excitement's building, but many people in the disability community feel shut out in this hearing.

I will be asking is our City prepared to welcome the 1 in 4 Americans who have some type of disabilities, how do we know what standards are in place to ensure that our public events are accessible? What safeguards will prevent organizers from ignoring people with disabilities, as has happened many times before?

I will also be asking who is in the room and who isn't? And if you are one of the major entities hosting events in Philadelphia, you should have representation in this hearing. If

you don't, that's part of the problem and we are addressing that today.

By law, city-sponsored events are supposed to be open to everyone, including the 1 in 4 amazing American adults who have some type of disability. But in reality, many Philadelphians with disabilities find it difficult to navigate public spaces and even harder to hold their government accountable for following the law. There is no regularly-enforced standards for accessibility and few consequences for blatantly ignoring the ADA. That's why I wanted to hold this hearing today.

We have an opportunity this year to do better as a city. This is a chance to listen to the voices of the people whose lived experiences of discrimination in our city so we can improve

accessibility for 2026 and beyond. Often they are simple, inexpensive changes that can make a world of difference for people with disabilities, but we overlook them because we have not taken time to listen.

With so many people affected and so many public dollars going into preparation for 2026, the city must take the time to listen and respond to the needs of people with disabilities. Through this hearing, I hope we will identify where the city is falling short and what steps must be taken to improve accessibility for 2026 and beyond. Thank you.

Are there any other committee members who would like to make remarks?

(No response.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Mr. Varghese, will you please call

the first panel we have to testify this afternoon on this resolution.

THE CLERK: Will the first panel please come forward? Michael Newmuis, Adrienne Moore, Kristen del Rossi and Meg Kane.

(Witnesses approached witness table.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Hello. Good afternoon. Please state your name for the record and proceed with your testimony.

MR. NEWMUIS: Hello. Michael Newmuis, 2026 Director for the Office of Mayor Cherelle Parker and the City of Philadelphia. Good afternoon, Chairmember Brooks and members of the Committee. My name is Michael Newmuis, Philadelphia 2026 Director, and I'm testifying on Resolution No. 250753.

Joining me today are my colleagues, Adrienne Moore, Executive Director of the Office

for People of Disabilities and Kristin del Rossi, Streets Department Commissioner as well as our peer, Meg Kane from Philadelphia soccer, 2026. First, I'd like to thank Chairperson Brooks for introducing this important resolution enabling this hearing.

2026 will be a major year for Philadelphia. And as the committee is well aware, Philadelphia will host a series of major events, including MLB All Star, FIFA World Cup 26, NCAA March Madness leading up to America's 250 anniversary.

We've been working hand-in-glove with these national and international organizations to ensure every visitor and every Philadelphia resident will be able to participate in and enjoy the array of 2026 special events. This

includes our most vulnerable residents and visitors, people with disabilities.

Philadelphia is home to over 280,000 people who identify as having a disability. We're talking about our friends, our neighbors, our brothers, our sisters and our seniors. They are intrinsic and valued members of our communities, essential to the fabric of our city. That is why I'm glad to be sitting before this committee alongside my colleagues to share what we're doing to ensure all events, not just in 2026, but importantly in every single year, are accessible for everyone to enjoy.

While Philadelphia is the proud host city for a litany of 2026 events, we wouldn't be able to put on these events, which includes making them accessible, without the

invaluable partnership of our event sponsors and their execution. Because neither I nor my colleagues at the City can speak directly for the 2026 event sponsors. We may defer some of the relevant questions to the event sponsors if the committee asks questions outside of the city's own accessibility work.

But I do want to talk a little bit about the work that the city is doing for what we're owning. You know, so much of 2026, although we've got these major tent pole events, is going to be about spreading the spirit of celebration across our neighborhoods, across every single Council District.

We're going to host 250 block parties that will be on supercharge. We're going to have over 50 community partners amplifying their events throughout

Philadelphia. That includes some of our traditional evergreen events but also some new ones, and it's so important that we make those accessible.

We are working across those partners and our block captains, offering ADA training to not just make sure that they can understand but also a resource to add accessibility functions. Think about sensory zones and creating those and activations where we're having. Think about the sensory-friendly kits. You mentioned earlier it just takes a little bit of touches to make something go a long way for individuals to really explore, and that's exactly what we're looking at.

You know, when I was an undergrad in college I was a caregiver to a (inaudible) paraplegic and saw firsthand how

important it is and that we're ensuring that we have this lens, and that's why I'm really, really, really excited for today's hearing.

In closing, we come before you today to share how the city (inaudible) accessibility, but also to listen and to learn from our other esteemed panelists and those who are offering public comments later today, to hear firsthand from their experience and their expectation because their voices are critical to this conversation, and of course to glean insights and wisdom from the members of this Committee. We look forward to everyone's ideas.

On that note, I'd like to pass it along to my colleague Adrienne Moore who can speak to the details of the city's accessibility work. Thank you.

MS. MOORE: Thank you,

Michael. Good afternoon, Chairperson Brooks and members of the Committee. My name is Adrienne Moore and I am the Executive Director of the Office for People with Disabilities. I am testifying on Resolution No. 250753.

As Michael alluded to, Philadelphia's accessibility work is not a one-time thing. It's not just for 2026 at the Office for People with Disabilities. Accessibility is not an afterthought. It is the foundation of equity, inclusion and civic participation.

In the City of Philadelphia, we believe that every resident, regardless of ability deserves full access to public life, cultural experiences and city services. Accessibility is not just a legal requirement. It is a moral imperative and a reflection

of our city's values. In our office, accessibility is not an option. It is a civil right, a legal mandate and a reflection of Philadelphia's commitment to equity and inclusion.

Our work is grounded in federal, state and local laws that affirm the right of every resident to participate fully in public life. This includes the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Together these laws require that public programs, services and spaces be accessible to people with disabilities, physically, programmatically and digitally.

As Philadelphia prepares to host major public events in 2026, including large scale celebrations and citywide initiatives, our office is working proactively to ensure that

accessibility is embedded in every stage of planning and execution. We are collaborating across departments and with community stakeholders to ensure effective communication, a welcoming environment for all and to uphold the highest standards of universal design principles.

While 2026 presents exciting opportunities, our commitment to accessibility does not begin or end with high profile events. Accessibility is a year-round priority. Whether it's a neighborhood block party, a public meeting or a city-sponsored gathering, we prioritize access for all because inclusion should never depend on the size or visibility of an event. Together we are building a Philadelphia where every voice is heard, every space is welcoming, and every resident can participate

fully.

The Office for People with Disabilities created a best practice guide earlier this year for event planners and vendors to consider when ensuring ADA compliance with special events. It is a comprehensive guide that is available on the city's Office of Special Events' website. It covers entrance and parking accessibility, accessible pathways, ramps, restrooms, appropriate seating, signage, accessible transportation options, communication provisions like sign language interpreters, assistive listening devices and accessible written materials.

It also discusses training for event staff, ensuring that food and beverage options are accessible and that staff considers accessibility needs for emergency or evacuation procedures, break

areas, rest spaces and more. Further, our contracts with city vendors require those vendors to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Additionally, these are all permitted events and our permitting process requires that vendors certify that they will comply with the ADA. We also collaborate with other accessibility offices so that we can stay abreast of what is happening in other cities. Our office participates with the Coalition of Municipal Offices for People with Disabilities, which is a group of various cities including St. Louis, New York City, San Francisco and Boston, just to name a few.

We have already been doing this work with partners like the Eagles Autism Foundation,

KultureCity, which is the organization which qualified us as a sensory, inclusive city, Representative Hohenstein's office and his Biannual Disability Summit, Cities of Inclusion, Vision for Equality, Arc of Philadelphia and Tech Aisle, which is the office within Temple University as well as various city departments, including the Free Library, Parks and Recreation, Property and Rebuild.

Tech Owl is Temple's program. It has a lending library of accessibility equipment. Many residents that contact our office are referred to this service and it has various devices available to be borrowed, such as folding canes, portable power chairs and communication devices.

We also have provided sensory inclusion training to city employees, which began in 2023. By

May of 2025, we had approximately 13,200 employees complete the training which equips staff with the tools to recognize and support individuals with sensory sensitivities such as autism, PTSD or other neurodivergent conditions.

We are fostering an environment that reduces sensory overload. Our work with city departments is extensive and ongoing and this work serves residents and the many visitors we expect to come in 2026. We have worked with the Fire Department to ensure that when wheelchair users have an emergency and are brought to the hospital via an ambulance, the wheelchairs do not get left behind and are instead brought to the hospital with them.

We are also working with the Office of Innovation and Technology to ensure that city

websites are accessible to both visitors and residents with disabilities. We have worked with the Airport, which recently hired its own accessibility coordinator, which is fantastic. The Airport is working really hard to ensure that visitors and residents have a great welcome to our city, whether that's making sure that people who need wheelchair assistance to their flights can get that or making sure that service animals are treated appropriately in the airport.

With our ADA Unit project in 2023, we worked with libraries and Parks & Rec to make accessible improvements such as accessible signage and grab bars in restrooms. We also have installed over 600 accessible signs in City Hall with raised, tactile and Braille lettering. All of these improvements have increased

accessibility for residents and visitors in the city and this is just some of the work the city is doing to ensure that Philadelphia is welcoming and accessible for everyone every year, not just 2026.

Thank you. That concludes my testimony. And now, I would like to pass it to the Streets Commissioner Kristin del Rossi, who can speak to the city's accessibility infrastructure work. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER DEL ROSSI: Good afternoon, Chairperson Brooks and members of the Committee. My name is Kristen del Rossi and I am the Commissioner for the Streets Department. I am testifying on Resolution No. 250753. The Streets Department is responsible for ensuring that all public right-of-way is accessible to all users.

As such, we review plans

and improve our right-of-way with ADA ramps and accessible signals. As you can imagine, this is quite a large but impactful job since Philadelphia has more than 2500 miles of roadway and over 20,000 intersections. As you have heard from my colleagues, our commitment to accessibility does not begin or end at high profile events. We are working hard every day to improve accessibility in Philadelphia.

I am pleased to share that in Fiscal Year 2025; 1,696 ramps were constructed for a total of 2,645 over the past three fiscal years and our ADA ramp work continues now in FY26. Specific to preparations for 2026, I'd like to highlight the interagency coordination occurring to prepare Lemon Hill to host the FIFA Fan Festival for the World Cup. Our contractor James J. Anderson

Construction Company is scheduled to begin milling and paving operations around Lemon Hill this week.

Work will take place during daytime hours and milling is expected to last approximately one week. Once milling of the streets is complete, Anderson will proceed with the bump-outs and curbline modifications at Sedgley and Poplar Streets followed by paving and line striping. This work also includes the construction of sidewalks, which also incorporates the construction of ADA accessible ramps.

At the same time, Streets is coordinating with Philadelphia Parks and Recreation to finalize the location of a new water service to the Lemon Hill area. That work is anticipated to occur this month. Our goal is to

complete the full Streets Department scope of work at Lemon Hill by late fall, allowing time to address any punchlist items before the end of the year or early 2026.

This type of coordination is not only for Lemon Hill, which will see most of the infrastructure improvements previously mentioned, but also for the sports complex, Old City Independence Mall and all the neighborhoods celebrating the 250th anniversary of our nation and the FIFA World Cup. This also includes coordinating a transportation plan between the City of Philadelphia, PennDOT, SEPTA, SEPTA Access, formerly known as CCT Connect, and all the ridesharing companies which will allow the 2026 events to be transit-accessible for all who visit wish to attend. Thank you for the opportunity. We are happy

to respond to questions at this time.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you all for your testimony. I want to recognize the presence of Majority Leader Katherine Gilmore Richardson while we're here.

So I have a few questions for the panelists, but before I open up --

COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: There's another --

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: 1, 2, 3, 4 -- I'm sorry.

MS. KANE: That's quite all right. No problem. Meg Kane. I'm representing Philadelphia Soccer 2026. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I'm sure we'll get right to questions. I'll go as speedily as possible. FIFA World Cup is more than just a global sporting event. It's the celebration of soccer's unifying

power to transcend borders, cultures and backgrounds.

As the pinnacle of the world's game, the tournament's global reach carries with it a responsibility to ensure that the event is inclusive, equitable and accessible to all. As we prepare to welcome the world to Philadelphia for FIFA World Cup 26, accessibility is the cornerstone of our operational planning. Whether it's through physical infrastructure or the distribution of information, we recognize our duty to ensure that all individuals have opportunities to experience the magic of the World Cup.

In support of that goal, Philadelphia Soccer 2026 is actively engaged with FIFA, the City of Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Eagles and other key stakeholders, to create a welcoming

environment rooted in inclusivity across all tournament-related venues.

At the stadium, our partners at the Eagles are leading the way in accessibility innovation, beginning with the very first fan touchpoints, parking and entry. Designated ADA drop-offs and pickup zones are located near key entrances. Complimentary wheelchair services are available at every gate, with trained staff assisting guests throughout their arrival experience.

Once inside the stadium, Lincoln Financial Field offers comprehensive accommodations, including ADA seating and relocation platforms on every level, plus a state-of-the-art sensory room that serves as a haven for individuals with autism or others experiencing types of

neurodiversity.

Extending accessibility to people with sensory differences, the stadium also offers assisted listening devices and closed captioning on LED boards. I will also note that FIFA is exploring additional accessibility for the hearing impaired for the upcoming FIFA World Cup tournament and has had some very good successes in testing it during Club World Cup.

This planning represents just one piece of the fan journey, as the World Cup extends far beyond the stadium, as Commissioner del Rossi described. Recognizing that 70% of all visitors will not have a match ticket, Philadelphia Soccer 2026 is also deeply committed to the accessibility of FIFA fan Festival at Lemon Hill Park.

Alongside our partners in city government, we're investing

in the improvements to the park, designed to enhance safety and the overall visitor experience. Upgrades, which are currently underway, include the removal of existing hazardous pathways, the construction of new more accessible paths, the reconstruction of sidewalks and the installation of 12 new ADA ramps.

In addition, the city is resurfacing the streets and conducting the curb realignments that will make intersections safer for all residents and visitors. And the next phase of construction will also include the build-out of a new inclusive playground. Our selection of Red Rock as our operational management firm for FIFA Fan Festival further reflects our dedication to making the tournament accessible to all.

Red Rock partners with

Accessibility Live, an industry leader in creating comprehensive accessibility solution for live events. Accessibility Live helps event organizers, venues and clients create fully ADA-compliant, accessible and inclusive event experiences.

Together with Philadelphia Soccer 2026 and Red Rock Fan Festival leadership, Accessibility Live will design strategies to ensure compliance while prioritizing guest experience, safety and efficiency. Our shared focus will include, but is not limited to, assisted listening systems, ASL interpretation service, animal verification, accessible viewing platforms and seating areas, dedicated access centers and guest services, ADA compliant restrooms, mobility assistance and shuttle

services and accessibility training for event staff and volunteers.

Each service is designed to eliminate barriers and enhance the guest experience, ensuring compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and other accessibility guidelines. In conclusion, Philadelphia Soccer 2026 and our partners remain steadfast in our commitment to equity and inclusion. As planning continues to evolve, we remain focused on delivering a tournament that prioritizes accessibility for all residents and visitors. Through this work we are not only preparing to host a World Cup, we are building a legacy of inclusion that will resonate far beyond 2026 because the beautiful game belongs to everyone. Thank you.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you all so much for your

testimony. I have a few questions for the panelists before I open it up for questions to my fellow committee members. And I hope all you feel free to chime in, in any way on these questions.

But I want to start just so you guys can have a clear understanding why this is so important to me, and I'm going to open it up, just use hands, no words, have you ever taken a group of young people out in the city of Philadelphia?

(Hands raised.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Have you ever taken a group of young people out where five of them have a wheelchair, two of them are visually impaired, and three have some other level of disability?

(No hands raised.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: It's not easy currently and I know

people make the best efforts to do this, but me personally I spent 17 years working with children and adults with disabilities, and my primary job was to make sure young people had the opportunity to experience Philadelphia the way I had the opportunity to experience Philadelphia. So we've been to all the stadiums. We've been to all the malls. We've been to fine dining. We've been to theaters. Every time, every time we were hit with some level of a roadblock, even just navigating the sidewalks.

Has anyone ever gotten into a wheelchair and tried to navigate any building that you go in frequently? It will change your perspective on what ADA is and what accessibility should look like in the city. I've done it. I haven't done it yet in this building, but my eyes are so clear to it I can

just look at a building and be like, nope, this not gonna work.

That is the lens that the folks that are coming to me are talking about. That is the lens that I'm entering this conversation with. And I'm really excited -- because I think I brought this up in individual meetings with folks, and this has been one of my number one issues since I've been elected because of the real experience that I've had, so my questions are grounded in that for us to make sure that we're hearing for the folks in the room.

And some of the people that I just mentioned in these groups are adults now and they're in this room, so I have a responsibility to advocate for the young adults that pushed me to my limits. Anywhere they said they wanted to go, I had to make it

accessible for them to go and it was a lot of heartache and pain having a bunch of teenagers that want to do something as simple as go to a restaurant and they said it's accessible, and we get there and we can't get to a table or the bathrooms they can't get in or they said it's an elevator but it only fits certain types of wheelchairs, and we have to rearrange our whole event because what they said was accessible really wasn't. And I just want us to be prepared for that platform when we come.

Michael, you talked to a number of folks with disabilities in our city and many more will be coming. And we want to make sure that our city is really welcoming to all Philadelphians and visitors that want to enjoy this amazing year that we're going to have in our city.

And I want families to be able to navigate it because I started with disabilities. However, if you have a stroller, that's a more visible thing. It's just as bad. I had a double twin stroller trying to navigate something and it was like, I'd rather not go and we don't want that to be the case. So with that in mind, I just want to kind of frame that for the question and so you have a perspective on where I'm coming from.

So my first question is for Director Moore. In your testimony you mentioned a best practice guide for city events. Can you walk us through the process for ensuring that city-sponsored events comply with this policy? And are there inspections before the events? Because we've heard from constituents many times that

various events that receive city funding or are put on by the city are not accessible. And can you talk to those standards, how those standards are enforced? Give us some example of city enforcement against events that have not complied with accessibility standards.

MS. MOORE: Yes. So Councilwoman Brooks, my office works with Special Events with regards to city events. And according to the contract that is used for vendors and event planners, they agree to comply with ADA. If there are any vendors that do not in the event apply these guides to the planning process -- well, first of all, in the meeting with the vendors an ADA plan is usually presented. So that's number one.

I am present for those

meetings with Special Events. So we review those plans. And that could be anything from the platforms that are going to be utilized or the seating area that's going to be prioritized for people with disabilities or the closed captioning all of that.

If for some reason, those plans do not go according to the original layout for the event, Special Events will go back to the vendor to figure out what happened, why this did not go as planned and they do have the possibility of not being utilized again. I mean, the focus is for all vendors to apply the ADA guidelines in planning.

I'm going to pass it to Michael just to talk a little bit more about what might happen in the event that a vendor does not comply.

MR. NEWMUIS: So the

Office of Special Events would really be the person to enforce that element, which is run by my colleague Jazelle Jones, who's not presently here. So we could follow up in writing with the response from that specific lens because I don't want to misspeak for Jazelle's domain about what happens if a specific vendor does not comply.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: If we had a phone call in the event that something wasn't accessible, who do we send it to directly? Do we send it to you or do we send it to Special Events?

MR. NEWMUIS: Office of Special Events would handle that. They handle all the permitting. They have the right to veto a permit for a vendor as we just described who did not comply in the past. They have the power to issue

a permit, but they would be the enforcement arm.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Also in your testimony, you referenced a new document from this March that establishes a modification request grievance and appeals procedure under ADA. The document emphasizes that accessibility modification are not required if they impose an undue administrative or financial burden. What accessibility actions, if any, (inaudible) as the city determined, are not required because of undue administrative financial or other burdens and what accessibility actions are under review for the burden that they can impose on the city?

MS. MOORE: Can you rephrase that question a little bit?

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS:

Yes.

MS. MOORE: Thank you.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: So for Americans with Disability Act, these things are a requirement, and the doc is saying that if it poses an undue administration or financial burden, that you don't have to comply. And the question is what actions have been determined to require undue administrative, financial or other burdens that are kind of under review at this time as a burden to impose on the city?

MS. MOORE: Okay. I do not know of any specific examples that would fall in that category currently. However, within the ADA the undue burden is listed under the ADA. Meaning, if the cost is too exorbitant, if the cost would bankrupt, for example, a business, if the cost of an accessible

modification would cause a bankruptcy in a business, then that would be seen as an undue burden.

So there aren't that many examples that I could give within the city that would cause an undue burden. If it's something that financially would be exorbitant, let's say I can't -- maybe in the millions where it could bankrupt a department, but other than that it should not cause something that could be accessible for someone to not occur.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: I'm going to go a little off script a little bit. I think my staff might kill me for this, but just while we here and we're on this vein I'm going to go. So I've heard that regarding Rebuild, some of the Parks and Recreation plans have been changed because of accessibility issues. So we're

doing actual projects that are not accessible and is affecting us being able to use some of the Parks and Recreation facilities for even voting. So I've heard several complaints about this.

I'm not sure where that's documented. I don't know how true it is. But while we're on this question that would be undue burden or financial constraints to a new project that we're investing millions of dollars in communities where people with disabilities live and would like to enjoy facilities and we're eliminating accessibility for local park or playground, I don't know how true that is but this is multiple --

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Point of information, Madam Chair.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Mm-hmm.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: As a

former Chair of Parks and Recreation, point of information. So Rebuild did have a mandate to ensure that sites met disability requirements. Yes, that is true and then some. So we continue to monitor and pay attention to that. But if you have specific sites in mind that you would like for us to look at, particularly if they're used as polling places or if they're just used in general by people from the community, they should be accessible.

And even I know, under Sue Slawson, we've talked about and started thinking about building up, which is something that Parks and Recreation generally doesn't do in their sites. They don't want to go up because they don't want to add an elevator but that's changing as well, so that it's even more accessible. So --

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Do you want me to send a request that we have about this over to you or --

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Well, to the Chair or myself. I'd be happy to help out as well. But I just wanted to make that point of information.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Okay. I'll make sure that my team sends the exact Parks and Recreation centers that we had complaints that are a part of Rebuild that the accessibility was eliminated in the project because of undue financial burden. I think there's two or three current programs that were mentioned to us.

Okay. This is another question I have for you. Has the Office of People with Disabilities received an increase in funding this fiscal year? And are there

more resources that are needed for you to complete the work that you're doing?

MS. MOORE: The Office for People with Disabilities did not receive funding for this fiscal year. However, yes, it would be great to have funding for some of the initiatives that we would like to move forward.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you so much for your testimony. My next question is for Michael Newmuis. What are your expectations for the accessibility for 2026 events in Philadelphia? How close are you to meeting those expectations? And will there be inspections of events to ensure that they comply with the city's accessibility requirement? And how will this be done?

MR. NEWMUIS: Certainly, and I apologize that my colleague

who is from the Office of Special Events is not here, the colleague that actually executes on the actual events and their inspections, whose team goes out to ensure these complaints, because it's an important question.

I'll say my expectation for the 250th birthday of America for Philadelphia is that we do embody the spirit of welcoming everyone, because welcoming people is all people in Philadelphia's DNA and it can't be limited to just individuals. It's got to be every single person and meeting every person where they are.

So I can't speak for the Office of Special Events, and I do apologize to you that we can't answer that verbally, but we will follow up in writing on exactly what steps are taken through that office to ensure compliance across.

But as my colleague mentioned, we expect vendors to comply with the contractual obligation. And in that contract, it's clear we are expecting that they comply with ADA accessibility as guidelines from the federal government. So anyone that's not meeting the contract, that would not be meeting our expectations.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you so much. Our next question is around the 2026 New Year Party. Will this event be fully accessible and what outstanding barriers exist to ensuring it is accessible? Is that still within your --

MR. NEWMUIS: Sure. We are contracted with a vendor ESM Productions that is not new to this. Their events, whether it was the PayPal experience or Made In America, have all demonstrated a

strong track record of having fully accessible experiences, full compliance with the ADA, and that's why they have been re-engaged by countless individuals, including Ambassador Cohen in Canada because there's a strong track record there. So based on that track record and based on the contract, we fully expect that that event will meet the standard that has already been laid out.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you. And the other one is, I believe that FIFA requires the city to submit a document outlining the city's accessibility planner for FIFA 2026 events. Will you please share a copy of the city's FIFA 2026 planning with Council so we can fully understand and support the mission that you have?

MS. KANE: Yes, I believe that will be developed by

the Office of Special Events as our key partner in this. So we will work with them to ensure that Council is provided with a copy of that once it's completed. It will be informed by the finalization of the safety and security planning as well and transportation mobility. So all of that will feed into it. I think they expect us to have that provided in Q2 of '26 so before the tournament, but a little bit closer to the tournament.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS:

Thank you. We appreciate your testimony and efforts to complete your project as rapidly as possible by the end of the fall. One piece of your testimony is about sensory friendly spaces, and we've heard from stakeholders that they would like these spaces to include nature connections, including water sounds and touchable plants. We

appreciate your foresight in designing these spaces. Could you please include the requested nature elements, including the sounds of water and touchable plants; is that possible?

MS. KANE: I think it would be at the FIFA Fan Festival site. We can work with Red Rock Entertainment. Our operational management firm Michael Delbene is also our executive producer for Fan Festival, so we can certainly work on integrating that in. With regard to the sensory friendly room at the stadium, that would fall under the purview of the Philadelphia Eagles and FIFA. We certainly can pass that on as a recommendation, but where we can have active conversations is related to the Fan Festival.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you. We appreciate the

efforts to encourage ADA training for block captains to facilitate the block parties. Would you be willing to include a stakeholder advocate here in planning and implementing that training? And can you mandate that training?

MS. MOORE: Yes, so we would definitely be happy to have a stakeholder involved along with Special Events. And what was the second part to your question, Councilmember?

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: And is the training a mandate -- oh, is it an option or mandated?

MS. MOORE: No, it's mandated. So in order to receive the I think it's called the gift pack. Michael, my colleague, can correct me if I'm not right. But in order for the block captains to receive that gift pack, they will have to complete the training.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS:

Thank you for that. It's nothing more frustrating than getting to an event and you're asking folks a simple question or where's the accessible bathroom, what is that, you know. Those are the things that are so important. So thank you for considering that.

I have a bunch of questions here so let me just read them all off. Meg Kane, Could you tell us what standards and requirements for accessibility are you following? And has the city communicated local legal accessibility requirements to your organization? And what is the process that you and the city use to ensure that those standards are met?

MS. KANE: Sure. So the Philadelphia Soccer 2026 follows the standards that the City of

Philadelphia sets for ADA compliance. The City of Philadelphia is the host. We are the host committee. And so, we are working extremely closely with the Office of Special Events, Parks and Recreation and a variety of different offices, OTIS certainly, but our standards align fully with the City of Philadelphia and the enforcement of those by the city.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Before the World Cup comes, we know that there are going to be trainings for volunteers and staff. Trainings advocates tell us that having volunteers and staff trained on accessibility and how folks can access events, bathrooms, parking and other needs is essential. Advocates have connected with our office hoping to evaluate FIFA's training staff programs in advance of the World Cup events to help

ensure the games are maximally accessible. Would you be willing to meet with some of the experts we are hosting today in order to optimize a pre-event training?

MS. KANE: Yes, we would absolutely welcome the opportunity to meet with those advocates. We will also carry any of their questions or concerns to FIFA. The volunteer training program is conducted by FIFA and fully by the organization. So while we facilitate the recruitment of volunteers and the volunteer space, which is right now getting ready to open next week at the Fashion District in Philadelphia.

We do not control the content, per se. But we would be happy to, one, meet with advocates and, two, bring forward any concerns or questions that they may have to FIFA for integration into

that. We certainly recognize the importance of making sure that accessibility and the advocacy for that happens and is part of that volunteer training.

I also know that with regard to SEPTA, the Fanbassadors which are of the Philadelphia Visitor Center Corporation and other local volunteer efforts, I know that accessibility is a key component of their training as well.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you. As we discussed, stakeholders have reached out to our office to inquire as to whether these events will include the sensory-friendly spaces, including quiet, calming areas featuring natural sounds on audio and comfortable relaxation-based spaces. These kinds of spaces can make all the difference in whether

someone prone to sensory overload can join and enjoy an event. Will you provide calming spaces for upcoming major events?

MS. KANE: I can only speak to Philadelphia Soccer 2026, but the FIFA Fan Festival will do so. And we've also engaged with Dr. Wendy Ross of Jefferson to help us to ensure best practices from providing those types of spaces from a neurodiversity standpoint. And again, the sensory-friendly room at the Philadelphia Eagles stadium is already in place.

I believe they are -- it will likely provide the same type of accessibility and areas that happen during concerts, Eagles games, anything that happens at the stadium. But for FIFA Fan Festival, we do plan on having those areas available.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS:

Thank you so much. And I want to thank all you for your testimony and I'm going to leave you with a piece of homework because I don't remember your hand went up. Get a wheelchair and navigate your workspace. The number one thing, if there's no wheelchair in your workspace, you've already failed.

Because we had an event that one of our staff members sprained her ankle and we had to figure out how to get her out the building and we couldn't find a wheelchair in this building. So we have to do better. You never know when incidents happen and we have to be proactive, because once you experience it, it will change your life.

Even if you just navigate your regular work day in a wheelchair, it will help you understand the importance of

accessibility for people's everyday life. So that's the only thing I ask of each one of you, and you'll understand what I'm asking for even better. Try to navigate out the lunch in a wheelchair here in the city of Philadelphia. It's the scariest experience ever because these curbcuts are horrible. So thank you so much for your time and your testimony.

Do any of my colleagues have further questions for the panel?

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: I do.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Okay.

COUNCILWOMAN BASS: Thank you so much. Thank you so much for being here. I just have a few questions. And I apologize, I have a 2 o'clock so I have to leave shortly but I just want to say a

couple of things. So I wanted to really underscore the Chair's commentary around how hard it is to navigate if you're in a wheelchair or if you have issues in terms of walking or being ambulatory.

Anyone who's ever seen me on a weekend usually sees me with someone who is somewhat disabled, on a cane, and that's actually my sister. So we're out, you know. She's usually with me at events in the evening and sometimes on the weekends. And the amount of fear of falling because the streets and sidewalks are so bad and so difficult to navigate. And so, I know we've done a lot on that here in the city, but we really need to do so much more because it's only when you're in that position as someone who is disabled, or someone who's somewhat of a caregiver for someone who is disabled that you

can really get a real understanding of just how challenging it is.

And challenging really doesn't even begin to underscore it. It's something that can really make you fearful to go outside. You're fearful of crossing the street. You're fearful -- because I say, if you're on Germantown Avenue, the cobblestones aren't laid just right so that you feel comfortable walking through a crosswalk.

And I also have had my father-in-law who was in a wheelchair, so I've done the gamut in terms of understanding of how difficult it can be. But I wanted to say around next year as we get ready for, you know, Philadelphia, the big welcoming, so many folks coming into town and just being tourist-ready in places like Germantown and Chestnut Hill and

other areas where there are those cobblestones, when you come up, you know, starting at Germantown Avenue and Broad Street in Nicetown, you know, when you're coming up all the way up to the top of the hill those cobblestones are in bad condition, but it is a very historic area.

Michael, we know that you have worked with our office and being so generous to give money to Philadelphia Germantown 250 so that we can have activities, we can entice people to come to that part of the city. We don't want everything downtown. Downtown is great, but we want Uptown too. We want to see some folks come through and see Philadelphia's history and see all that we have to offer.

And so, to do that we really need to ensure that they can navigate those streets and we need to understand how difficult it is

as it stands right now. And so, we've done a lot around 88 curbcuts here in the city. That's great, but it's no good if you can't navigate the sidewalk.

And so, I use that as a particular example for a young lady who's in my district and who has significant disabilities and needs to be pushed in a wheelchair by a parent and they can't navigate the sidewalks. So it almost is like it traps them in their home where you almost can't get out because you can't even get down a block, you can't go around the corner, you can't really be any place that you might want to be.

And beyond that, the other issue we have, and I don't see the Parking Authority here, but when we talk about folks with disabilities, we leave out the Parking Authority way too often,

because sidewalk parking just drives me insane. The lack of consideration for people parking on sidewalks and not recognizing that somebody can't get down the sidewalk because you put your big ole SUV up on the curb, you know, something has to happen with having the Parking Authority engage and thinking about it as an issue from the disabled community, from those who have disabilities.

So I say all that to say that I'm looking forward to seeing how we're going to make sure that Philadelphia is a place that can be navigated by everyone when it comes to next year and I'm certainly willing to lend my assistance in any way possible. So thank you so much.

MR. NEWMUIS: Thank you.

MS. MOORE: Thank you.

COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

Thank you. First, I want to thank the Chair for hosting this meeting. I think this conversation is essential. It is unfortunately one of those issues, Chair Brooks, that we have to bring to the forefront because of our past history where we don't have the confidence and the trust that these issues have already been taken care of, and that's kind of where I want to start.

And this focus between you and our colleague Isaiah Thomas of just focusing on 2026 and making sure that it's accessible for all is so essential. I've been doing this work for a long time as well working more in the compliance area, making sure that the city is open and welcoming for everybody throughout our very, very diverse disability community.

This is certainly people

who use wheelchairs and other ambulatory devices, but it's also for folks who have vision concerns or variety of other disabilities and we need to make sure that we're seeing the full spectrum. And that's why it's so great that this room is packed with experts who are not only people living with disabilities, but also folks who are advocating for them or people with disabilities who are advocates as well. So they're the experts.

I can't wait to hear from them. But before you guys go, I have some questions for you. If you've been doing this for a long time, you'll see it's always surprising that each year we're barely building on what we've done before. We correct things of the past.

I remember when our good friend Chuck Horton back there was

the head of the Office of Disabilities. His job was to go out and measure doorways at the rec centers to see whether or not they were large enough. That should not have been his job. We needed to figure out very quickly that our doorways needed to be extended and just do it. It is much easier.

Again, the gains have been very small and very incremental. And I feel like this moment in time we keep talking about is a time where we can transform Philadelphia so that we make adjustments that are not just for next year in 2026 but that they really, really support all of our communities going forward.

So one question that's always gotten to me that I have to ask you about is really coordination, not just coordination of all of your efforts, but of

everything having to go into 2026 and whether it's streets and FIFA and whatnot, but very importantly also coordination of other development and construction that is going on in the city at the same time.

We all know it is illegal to block all four corners of a crosswalk with construction, construction, construction, construction. But what will happen in Philadelphia, certainly in the past, maybe not as much now, we go through a boom, everybody starts building and you can't cross the street.

It is impossible for folks to navigate the streets and it is illegal, it's wrong and it's always just taken a little bit of coordination to make sure that we know what's happening, that we know the north side of the street is

blocked off so let's make the south side very accessible.

One of my concerns is as we start to focus on 2026 and building up there, that we're not paying attention to the other projects that are happening. And so, who is going to oversee the coordination of everything that's happening in Center City and in all of our neighborhoods to make sure that our streets and sidewalks are accessible? That's question number one.

COMMISSIONER DEL ROSSI: Thank you for your question. Streets Department is actively monitoring the permits and projects that are happening within the city and we are taking a conscious effort to making sure projects get done in advance of other projects that are coming in. We are definitely monitoring that.

COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

Excellent. And then I want to go back to the penalties again. I'm sorry. I do know we are putting out best practices. We tell folks what the law is, what they have to do and then there'll be bad actors who don't follow the law.

Whose responsibility is it to make them follow the law, which would be they have choices? If they don't follow the law, there's consequences. Whose responsibility is it and what are the consequences?

COMMISSIONER DEL ROSSI:

Streets Department has inspectors in our highway districts that actively look at permits that are given out throughout the city of Philadelphia. And anyone who is not working within their permit limits, they are issued a violation depending on what they're obscuring

and what their permit allows them to do.

COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU:

Thank you. While we're on the subject, one of my favorite subjects I bring up to you all the time is the milling of the street versus the repaving. Are you getting any closer to closing that gap? So we don't have a milled street where it gives a 2-or-more inch drop from the sidewalk to actually repaving. I know you're working on it and I appreciate that so much, but we've got to close that gap and have it happen faster.

COMMISSIONER DEL ROSSI:

Yes, we're definitely closing the gap. We're getting there. This year I believe we did a little bit better at -- but I do know what you're talking about with the long, extended periods of time between milling and paving. But we are

actively working on closing that gap and actually beating our goal, if we could possibly do that one day.

COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: I think you talked about having the same company up near Lemon Hill both mill and pave.

COMMISSIONER DEL ROSSI: Yes.

COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: Is that helpful? It's the same company. They could almost come in behind themselves.

COMMISSIONER DEL ROSSI: They do. They sometimes -- it could be a little easier when it's the same company because then we don't have to coordinate between two different contractors. They can mill and then they can jump right in and pave right after they're done milling and we don't have to do the coordination between

two other companies. It just so happens to be that's who we have on contract.

COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: Okay. And then a little bit shift back to -- thank you for that. Appreciate that. I'm still rooting for you. We can do this. Going back a little bit more just to 2026 in general. We've got lots of ambassadors. We want to make sure all of them know about every accessibility area or protection we have for folks. We need to make sure that there's not just porta-potties on the street, that there are accessible ways to go to the bathroom.

We have to make sure that there's clear signage for folks in a variety of ways. What is the expectation of how people will receive materials? Is it a written pamphlet? Is it an app?

How are people going to know how to navigate Philadelphia for all of these festivities?

MR. NEWMUIS: You can -- I can --

MS. KANE: We'll jump in together. So from a Philadelphia Soccer 2026 perspective, wayfinding is a critical component of our planning efforts throughout the city. And that wayfinding will be informed by a variety of different things. One will be accessibility and will also be part of what the volunteer work will be, that there will be those that are able to -- it won't just be reliant on signage. It will also be people who are either vocalizing, can be able to speak multiple languages.

We are obviously going to inform some of our wayfinding and some of our planning around when we find out which teams are

coming from a linguistic standpoint, but from an accessibility standpoint we will also layer that into the wayfinding. That will go into that.

And from that perspective, the wayfinding is something that we will have very much throughout the city because we will be moving people to and from SEPTA and public transit. We will also be moving them to and from Lemon Hill. And then how to move people, you know, as I like to say, this is an and-both endeavor.

So if you are here for soccer, we also want you to go to the historic district. We want you to go out to the neighborhoods. We want to, you know, make sure that there's ways that we can do that. Accessibility is rooted in that wayfinding. To how we are arming

the volunteer core, again that lies with FIFA in terms of what they will have.

I believe though that from a Fanbassador standpoint -- I won't speak for Kathryn Ott Lovell and her team -- but from Fanbassadors and SEPTA, I believe there's a lot of online resources that are provided, and certainly we are evaluating as Philadelphia Soccer 2026 how to supplement that, but not reinvent the wheel.

MR. NEWMUIS: Yeah. And I think based on that question going back to Philadelphia 250 and prioritizing even some of the inperson trainings that we're doing, although I won't speak for them, to make sure that this is a lens. But obviously the city also includes across different departments, whether Special Events or Airport, Know Before You Go

resources and press releases that we're turning out and including on phila.gov.

COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: Okay. Not sure I fully got the answer. I would just -- anything in writing needs to be fully accessible to folks and anything digitally also needs to be fully accessible as well.

MS. KANE: Fully understood.

COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: Okay. And the last thing, if you haven't taken the Chuck Horton tour of this one yet either, make sure you take the tour of the SEPTA bus that is down underneath 12th and Market where people get to practice getting on the bus. They can practice getting on the bus with their wheelchair. They can practice getting on a bus if they are cautious for whatever reason.

There's a lot of things that they can do down there that will get them ready for the big experience. Thank you so much.

MS. KANE: Thank you.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you. Thank you so much to this panel for participating and we look forward to continue to work together.

MR. NEWMUIS: Thank you for your leadership.

MS. MOORE: Thank you.

MS. KANE: Thank you.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Are there any other questions from the committee?

(No response.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you. Mr. Varghese, will you please call the next panel to testify on the bill.

THE CLERK: Will members of Panel 2 please come forward,

Vicki Landers, Yvonne Hughes and Dolores Brown Waters.

(Witnesses approached witness table.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Good afternoon to this panel. Please state your name for the record and proceed with your testimony. Vickie Landers.

MS. LANDERS: Good afternoon. My name is Vicki Landers and I use she/they pronouns. I'm a proud disabled Philadelphian, a nonprofit leader of Disability Pride Pennsylvania, a disability advocate and someone who regularly tends and organizes community events in the city.

Thank you to Councilwoman Kendra Brooks for allowing me to speak here today. I just want to say I'm very disappointed that Special Events didn't bother to show up today.

But I'm here today not just to talk about one event, but to talk about a pattern, a deeply rooted issue in how the city continues to disregard accessibility in public life, especially at the city-sanctioned events.

Let's start with one recent example, the Christmas Village in Center City. Every year Dilworth Park and LOVE Park are transformed into a festive marketplace filled with lights, music, vendors and holiday cheer. And every year it is blatantly inaccessible. The uneven ground and oversized cable covers make it a nightmare for anyone using mobility device.

Booths are often too high to reach or too cramped to approach. There are no clear navigation for blind- or low-vision attendees, and little to no

accessible seating portable. Portable restrooms are not ADA-compliant and no adequate signage for accessible restroom areas. But these are not minor oversights. These are barriers, literal and figurative, that prevent people with disabilities from participating fully in the city life.

This is not just about one event. This is about the city's systemic failure to enforce its own accessibility policies. I've been through the city's event planning process, and the truth is accessibility is not even a part of the conversation. There is no required accessibility plan, no checklist, no mechanism for proactive inclusion. It's not even an afterthought. It's just absent.

It's not the fault of individual organizers. That

failure sits squarely on the City of Philadelphia. By not embedding accessibility into the event application and approval process, the city is effectively giving permission for exclusion. You can't expect inclusion if the foundation isn't built to support it. The responsibility does not and should not fally(sic) sale -- fall solely, sorry, on event producers. This is a systemic issue and the system starts at City Hall.

If food trucks can be fined or shut down for health code violations, why are event producers allowed to violate accessibility standards year after year with no consequences? This sends a dangerous message that disabled people are not the priority, that our safety, our dignity and our right to participate is optional.

Let me be clear: We are

not asking for special treatment. We are asking for equal access. And under the Americans with Disabilities Act we are entitled to it. But even beyond legal obligation, there is a moral one. Philadelphia cannot call itself a city of inclusion while it continues to allow inaccessible public events.

If you say we're all welcome, then make sure that we can all get through the door or to the booth or to the stage and to the bathroom. And as we look towards the Philly 250 celebrations in 2026, I'm deeply concerned. This will be a major milestone in the city's history, a global stage.

But unless major changes are made now, Philly 250 will replicate the same exclusions that we've seen for decades. Right now there is no clear accountability

mechanism ensuring that city-sponsored events meet ADA standards. Accessibility remains an afterthought, not a foundational requirement.

And if that doesn't change, Philly 250 will not be a celebration for all. It will be another missed opportunity, another example of ableism in action. We need change and we need it now. I'm urging City Council and the Mayor's Office to take the following actions:

Enforce the city's existing accessibility policies, make accessibility a core compliance issue, not a suggestion. Two, conduct onsite accessibility inspections at permitted events, such like they do for health and safety inspections. Three, require accessibility audits led by people with lived experience, not just

consultants.

Four, deny and revoke permits for events that do not meet accessibility standards full stop. And five, ensure that planning for Philly 250 includes the disability community leadership from day one, not as an afterthought and not as token advisors.

The social model of disability reminds us we are not disabled by our bodies or minds. We are disabled by the barrier society puts in front of us, by the stairs where there should be ramps, by the silence where there should be captions, by the lack of investment where there should be intention and care. Access is not a privilege. It is a civil right.

I urge you to take responsibility as leaders. Review and enforce accessibility policies, require audits, involve disabled

people in planning and oversight, make access non-negotiable, make your event successful because they're not, and I include everybody in that.

So I leave you with this: If your version of One Philly, A United City does not include disabled people, it's neither one Philly or united and it's not the Philly we deserve. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you so much for your testimony.

The next person please proceed. State your name for the record and proceed with your testimony. Yvonne Hughes, yes.

MS. HUGHES: My name is Yvonne Hughes and I am an advocate, activist, Minister, teacher and I wear a few other hats. One of the

things I just more or less will piggyback, as Vicki said a lot of things, I'm also a blind individual and I get a lot of complaints, and I mainly talk about a lot of things with the streets because they were talking about that earlier.

And I get the calls. When a lot of our individuals -- when they're working on the street and they put the barriers up, they cannot get to the pavement. And when they can't get to the pavement, the bus driver don't check to make sure. They drop them off. And then that person that is blind has to find their way back to where they can be safe.

And I heard someone say earlier about the streets and the different things that are going on. When you are a visually-impaired person, when you're in a wheelchair, when there's trash,

when the sidewalk is not even, when it rains and that compliance piece was not put in and the sidewalk floods, then the wheelchair has to find another way because they did not get with the compliance people to find out how much they needed to do to make sure that that sidewalk was put in properly.

And a lot of times -- and I heard a lot of things that went on today and they talked about the different events. A lot of events we don't go to because they're not in compliance. And then when you try to get to a certain place, there is no one helping you because they feel they shouldn't. So most people don't go.

I went to the Horticultural -- they had something. It was the Cherry Festival. Well, first of all the

truck, they wouldn't let us in. And then they wanted us to walk almost two blocks to get up there to the Horticultural building, which was right off from Montgomery, but they would not move. And we had to actually call management to come and help us to get in and. And it wasn't accessible. They just decided, they said, no, you have to walk.

So if you think sometimes where a lot of us with disabilities don't participate, it's because we don't feel that you want us to participate because it's not accessible. And then when the flyer comes out and they invite you to an event, it doesn't say on that flyer that they're asking you to be a part of it. You have to usually let them know that you have a disability, are you accessible, are you going to have closed caption,

is there going to be an interpreter there. That should be done automatically.

Any time the event or anything that's being done, we should be included. Most of the time we're not included. I don't know how many individuals with disabilities that are part of the panel, that are committee people, that take a place. When do they offer us a spot? You know, you almost have to prove something every time you apply.

I help individuals with employment. And most of the time if they put you in an employment position, it's either cleaning, wiping off the tables, picking up the trash but they never sit down and say what would you like to do. Are we included in the planning? No. Are we invited to the table? No.

The only time, they say we need volunteers. And most of the time us with disabilities, we're going to volunteer because we like to be a part of things, not apart from things. Just because we have a label, we are not disabled. We want to be able to be a part -- and I hear 2026 that's coming up, but it's been going on for so many years, that when does it stop, because the City of Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection does not always exist and I've been here all my life.

So I'm reaching out and talking to our City Council. Because most of the time the only time you hear from the Council, and it's coming up again, is voting time. When it's time for someone to move from whatever position they may be in, then it changes. And sometimes when you go to the office

and you ask and it's Constituent Services, they do not know how to work with individuals with disabilities. And we usually have to go a roundabout way.

I go into the court system. They have ADA coordinators. Lawyers, people don't even know that ADA coordinators exist in our city that are here to support. But I wonder how many of us, even in our offices, have reached out to our ADA coordinators to make sure that the things that they're doing they are in compliance.

We get tired of every time something comes up we've got to get in touch with the Office of Civil Rights, which is in Philadelphia or go back to someone else and say, did you reach out to the Disability Office of Pennsylvania. It's always we don't

get the due process until we decide that we want to press charges or something.

And I think sometimes we just forget, disabled does not mean that you're unable. But if we're never given the chance to do anything, to be a part of something, you will never know. And they talk about the wheelchairs and different things. Do you know how hard it is to get into City Hall?

My para transit didn't know Northeast corner so she didn't know where to drop me off. The last time I was down here my CCT Access left me because they didn't know where anything was. So when we're talking about accessibility, transportation is a big problem because City Hall, you got to ride around City Hall, but either way you're still going to be let off in

the street because there's no accessibility to get into this building, unless you get dropped off in the street. They block the traffic. Then they walked around.

So I just want to make sure -- and we're looking -- Philadelphia can be a great place. I've been here all my life. I have great-grandchildren that are here. I was raised here, went to school here. When is it going to support those of us that have disabilities, offering us the jobs and not always going outside to get the people? You have people right here in this city.

So my concerns, and I heard a lot of things, and being repetitive is to make sure those of us with disabilities that we are at the table, that you really know how it hurts when we can't get our transportation together. It hurts

when we can't get the jobs that we need.

When all of those things that are coming up for 2026, make sure that we are considered for the job, for the place and make sure because you won't have to keep going back rebuilding if you start out right from the beginning.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you so much. Next person scheduled to testify you.

MS. BROWN WATERS: Good afternoon. I am Dolores Brown waters. Thank you for having me. I'm the mother of two. I have a 24-year-old autistic daughter and another one that's in college at the moment. So I'm here to talk about or give my testimony on the city and its failure to make people with disabilities comfortable

navigating through the city and attend special events when they occur and whether they are comfortable to attend.

The city has failed my daughter and other individuals with disabilities due to the lack of presence of officers, especially officers that look like her throughout their family, transportation industry, whether it may be riding the trains or buses. That's what she loved to do.

She used to love to ride them, but now is afraid to ride anywhere, especially by herself. I can include myself in this situation as well due to the lack of accommodations for individuals who have -- that's my thing right there, my rollator -- or other forms of equipment that help us move better and to get around.

There's not a lot of

places that have elevators or if they do, it's too far so feeling or being safe is a big issue. Now, as far as all the activities the city has with different events, there's nothing in place to accommodate my autistic daughter in particular from the loudness, like a sound box to help her feel that she could be a part of the activities and not feel intimidated or scared.

There's also no accommodations for it being too crowded so she can breathe or not feel claustrophobic. She loves people. She loves to be around people. But sometimes it can be a little bit too much. So there's no separate places that she can be and fill out in the industry of this Philadelphia city.

There's no special sections, no earlier times that be set aside for arrival. These are

just some of the issues that I just wanted to address to you. And I appreciate you all for letting me give my opinion. Thank you.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you so much for your testimony.

I think the court reporter needed a break. Five minutes?

COURT REPORTER: Yes.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: All right. We're going to take five minutes real quick for her to take a break and then proceed. Thank you so much.

(Brief recess.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Can we have the last panel come up for questions real quick and then we'll move onto the next.

Vicki Landers, Yvonne Hughes and Dolores Brown Waters. I think she went to the restroom --

there she is.

(Witnesses approached witness table.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you. Good afternoon, ladies. So I'm going to ask one question out to this panel and either all three or whoever feels best to answer it. That's perfect.

So we've heard from the Administration and event host about their plans for 2026. Are there areas that might have been missed or touched on that you would like to discuss further about what the city is missing at this time?

MS. HUGHES: I really think that they should learn to bring us to the table. You know, we have these type of things right here right now, public hearing, but it starts before the public hearing, you know. I heard different things with Streets. How

many people with disabilities have you talked to one-on-one? Before, a lot of these things for 2026 came up. Is there some planning with us at the table because I would like to see and I don't see a lot of that?

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you so much.

MS. BROWN WATERS: Yes, basically just having even a separate section that allows anybody with disabilities that need that extra space, because, like you said, wheelchairs, rollators and all that kind of stuff, you can't be that crowded because you can't get through if you don't have enough space to get through, so like a separate section. Even for my daughter, for anything that's loud noises and stuff, just like a separate box that can be built. The city built so many things. I

know they can build that.

MS. LANDERS: Yes, so for me I think that when you start thinking about what's going to go on, especially for a huge city event or city events like for next year, you need to look at who's in the room and make sure that everybody in the city, everybody should be a part of it and there should be conversations that are had.

They go out and they have these conversations around different neighborhoods all the time, but you should have those to find out what people in the city, especially I will say most of those spaces are actually accessible, not all of them, but that way disabled people can voice their opinion, because a lot of times, like today, we couldn't even get in the front door because the dumb door is

broken again.

So I just think that there needs to be some preplanning to pre-thought of what it is. And you have a very lively group. There's over 17% of the community here is disabled in Philadelphia. Use us. That's what we keep asking for.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Well, I want to thank you all for your advocacy and the support and the partnership in getting this hearing together and so many other things that we've done in the past.

And I'm going to open up for questions from my colleagues. I think Councilman Harrity.

COUNCILMAN HARRITY: (Inaudible). There we go. We're better now. Thank you for coming down here today. Like as you said, we do realize that it is difficult not only just to get to City Hall,

but to then access City Hall, especially with only one real access for people who are not employees.

I got a couple just brief questions and then also I will definitely commit with my colleague Kendra, if she wants to, we should be going out in the neighborhoods and talking to the people that live in that neighborhood with disabilities to find out how we could help better coordinating.

I heard Kendra -- I'm a highway guy so I didn't really realize that the bump-outs were not working, right. I thought they were a lot better than what we had had before. But again, this is 2025 and we made a lot of strides so maybe we can look back into that.

In general if you had to

rate the city's accessibility, say, from 1 to 10 for handicapped individuals, how would you each rate that?

MS. BROWN WATERS: 5.

MS. LANDERS: So I'll start. First, we're disabled folks.

COUNCILMAN HARRITY: Disabled. Thank you.

MS. LANDERS: Yes. And I just want to make quick comment. The one corner that you could really work on is the one across the street from your building. The one going up to Macy's, people in wheelchairs could fall over because it's so steep.

COUNCILMAN HARRITY: Thank you for that.

MS. LANDERS: Mm-hmm. But besides that, I just think that being out, making sure that we're at the table, making sure that our

voices are being heard. A lot of people talk about that, that table, like bringing people in. But just because you're at that table doesn't mean you get heard. And we're finding, oh, disabled people are at the table, but you don't listen to us. You don't do anything that we ask.

Even though most of the time we end up having to have meetings like this so that way we can discuss it. So I just think we as a whole we need to do much better job. And far as percentage, I don't know. Personally, I would say 40% might be helpful. I mean, they say that we're more accessible than a lot of cities, but that doesn't say much.

MS. HUGHES: I just wanted to mention, and I don't know if you remember that, that the Office of Disabilities put together

a map. And that map, if you look it up even on our website, you could see how many individuals with disabilities are in the city and it's probably more now, but they're not even in the parts of this city that are really good.

It's like the housing that we get is low standard, because sometimes landlords take advantage. So if you really want to reach out to individuals with disabilities, look up the map so that you're in the right neighborhoods and you're not just randomly going. Check and see because they're all over. But you need to go see what has been put together by our office to make sure that you kind of know what's out there.

Because a lot of times the biggest piece with Philadelphia, you're not paying

attention to us. You're not listening to us unless something happens or we plan to sit in or we come and stand or sit or roll in front. We have our individuals that are deaf and hard of hearing that cannot even at times get interpreters or closed caption.

It always has to be fighting or can you prove to me that you need this, you know. Have you done -- those of us that have disabilities when we have to apply for equipment, it has to be an equipment piece that we've already been assessed for. But if your assessment is less than six months, you don't have to go back again.

But if you haven't had an assessment in about a year, now mind you your disability didn't change, but they make you keep going back for an assessment just to prove equipment that you know

you need. So I encourage you, you know, my percentage, I started to say 2 because that's how I felt. But she was nice and she was better. So I said I'm going with them.

COUNCILMAN HARRITY: Okay. I appreciate that and I appreciate your honesty. And I apologize. I will make sure I know that. But we have a bunch of new members so please give us a chance. We're willing -- I have an autistic grandson, you know what I'm saying. I'm seeing it already. That's why I was glad to hear you with the room and stuff like that.

That was one of my other questions I was going to ask. Maybe something simple that we could definitely provide would maybe the quiet headsets. My grandson, he has to have that with him all the time. But I appreciate

you and your advocacy. Thank you all.

MS. HUGHES: Can I say one more thing?

COUNCILMAN HARRITY: Yes, ma'am.

MS. HUGHES: I just want to say something. Each time I ride on my para transit and they do something wrong, this is what they say: You know the driver is new look. So new will come in the beginning. But after you've been in it a while, you're not new anymore. Just find out what you can do to make it better.

COUNCILMAN HARRITY: Well, one thing we can definitely do is get together and meet. So I agree that if we're going to be doing this and we want to do it right, we need to talk to the people who are dealing with it and the activists that actually are

fighting for them on a daily basis.

Thank God we have our Leader here Kendra Brooks who is our Chairwoman. She's from the field so she gets it. I think we got some good members now that get it. So I'm committed. Let's get it on. Let's make this a regular thing where we're getting -- even if it's out on a less serious, maybe that's even better just getting together to talk and maybe the other room, the roundtable.

MS. HUGHES: That's worse.

COUNCILMAN HARRITY: That's worse?

MS. HUGHES: Sounds bad.

COUNCILMAN HARRITY: Well, we'll find some place that we can do it, also that's better accessible.

MS. HUGHES: Thank you.

COUNCILMAN HARRITY:

Thank you.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: All right. Thank you so much for this panel.

Mr. Varghese, can you please call the next panel.

THE CLERK: Will the members of our third panel please come forward? Brian Valdez, Cecilia Thompson and Representative Joe Hohenstein.

(Witnesses approached witness table.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: All right. Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you so much to this panel. Can you please state your name for the record and proceed with your testimony.

MS. GONTEK: Hi. Good afternoon. I'd like to thank Councilmember Brooks and the Committee for holding this extremely important hearing today.

As you may have noticed, I am not Representative Joe Hohenstein. My name is Tara Gontek. I am the Chief of Staff for the Representative. He Is currently in Harrisburg still fighting for a budget, so let's hope for the best.

So I am here today to read his testimony that he has provided. Madam Chair, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony to this committee as it reviews the progress the city is making to accommodate and provide full access to people with disabilities in our historic Semiquincentennial celebrations in 2026.

I know your work as an advocate for inclusion, true inclusion, and belonging for people with disabilities in our city. And I am grateful to provide my perspective on these issues. In my

work as a legislator, I have come to recognize the contributions that people with disabilities make to our society. I believe that everyone has value and worth, and it is our responsibility to create and support systems that foster the growth of people into full, contributing and equal citizens.

Providing accommodation and access is not about charity or pity. Piss on pity, many of my friends in the disability community say. Rather a focus on creating systems of access that better meet the needs of the disability community helps the entire community.

First, people with disabilities are empowered and can fully share their gifts. And second, the rest of the community often benefits from the improvements in access because

access is a universal need.

One specific project I am working on that I believe merits examination by the city as it prepares for 2026 is the Pennsylvania Tech Accelerator. I serve on the Steering Committee for the Accelerator, and we will be introducing legislation aimed at assessing state government systems of access and recommending changes so that the need of the entire community, especially those with disabilities, are the first consideration in designing those systems.

We are examining everything from how people can access the PA Department of State website, to register to vote and request ballots, to PennDOT driver's license services, to career-linked job postings and websites for people seeking

employment, to traditional benefits applications in the Department of Human Services. We seek to follow the principle of technology first. The idea of making use of the latest technological advances and even some of the old ones, to improve access to information, services and empowerment.

Again, I believe it is essential to approach this work, the improvement of access and accommodation from the perspective of equality. The people for whom the systems are being designed or reworked must be at the table to ensure that the new systems truly meets their needs.

This must be done with an attitude of recognition of everyone as equal partners in the work, equally necessary to complete the final vision. I believe that if the process is a reflection of

seeing everyone as equals, then the final products will also reflect that value.

Indeed the process can become a part of the story. In 2026 when we are on the world stage, we can show how to make larger accessibility improvements to things like transit, housing and hotel accommodation, restaurants and all of the events and activities that will be enjoyed by people coming from all over the world, including our very own 2026 disability Summit at the PA Convention Center on October 8, 2026.

If we approach the work correctly, these events can showcase a new way to naturally include access and improve the experience for everyone. They will also showcase the value of respecting everyone and celebrating

the gifts and talents of each individual regardless of how they walk, roll or move throughout the world.

It is my hope that the city and its partners will engage in this process. I stand ready to provide whatever support I can for my position in state government. I look forward to the opportunity to join in that work with you moving forward. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you so much for that testimony.

MR. VALDEZ: Good afternoon, Chairmember Brooks and members of the Council. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today and thank you for holding this important hearing. My name is Brian Valdez. I'm the Community Engagement Specialist at Inglis. I

actually am following in Chuck Horton's footsteps, at least trying to.

Inglis has supported our city's disability community for nearly a century year and a half. Our mission is to enable people with disabilities and those that care for them to achieve their goals and live life to the fullest. We serve nearly 2000 people across the state and within Philadelphia each day.

Most people know us because of our skilled nursing facility, Inglis House, right at Belmont and Conshohocken. We have over 180 people, mostly wheelchair-users living there. We also operate 400 accessible housing units, most of which are in Philadelphia and then we have a variety of community services, so technology services employment and

home modification supports.

When I found out that I was going to testify today, I asked some of the people we served what are their main barriers when trying to attend city events. These are some of the things that they said. Number one, which has already been mentioned several times, transportation. Transportation, transportation, transportation is key.

It doesn't matter how accessible the venue is. If people can't get there, then they are excluded. And so, that means making sure that there's the availability of CCT rides, things like that. Because Inglis will sponsor trips. We will bring people in vans, but other people use CCT and they want to be independent, but they just can't because there's not enough

availability.

Also, that means being cognizant of where the drop-off points for where ride share options are. Because I know for me going to the Linc where they drop you off, sometimes you have to walk all the way around the stadium to get to the gate, so that can be tough.

And then you asked earlier have you ever tried to use a wheelchair to navigate this building or other buildings. But another question you could ask is, have you ever tried to reserve an accessible Uber or rideshare option. There's just not a lot of availability. They cost more. Sometimes they don't come at all. So that's something that we all need to think about, because I can think of one person who's got stuck at different community events just because there is no rideshare.

So transportation, rideshare and then also when thinking of seating options, people in wheelchairs need space. But then for someone like me who uses crutches, we also need seating options. So if it's a buffet or a reception, where people normally stand around and mingle or hold a drink or food, I can't really hold that kind of stuff in my hand so I have to go look for a seat and sometimes that's separated from everybody else. So that's something also to consider.

And then they asked, well, what about signage. Signage needs to be at varying eye levels so people in the wheelchairs can see it and large print. But then also for people who are on crutches have a different perspective and a different eye level, so making sure that it's available from different

perspectives in large print.

And then also when talking about curbcuts or ramps or accessible porta-potties, bathrooms when there are large crowds, just monitoring to make sure that people aren't blocking the ramps, blocking the curbcuts. Giving people priority who have disabilities for using accessible bathrooms and using elevators and ramps. Very often that gets blocked by crowds.

And then when there are crowds, just also monitoring and being cognizant of giving people in wheelchairs the ability to move. One person told me he had attended a concert and he couldn't go backwards, he couldn't go forward, he was just stuck because it was so crowded.

And then the final thing I'll say is when there are accessibility features, making sure

that they're working, particularly elevators, things like that. One person mentioned an elevator near Penn's Landing that hasn't been working for a long time, so that's another thing we need to be thinking about and working on.

And then finally, also considering virtual options for people that can't travel or can't find an option for transportation, are there virtual options that would allow them to interact and be part of what's going on. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you so much for your testimony.

MS. THOMPSON: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for the opportunity to speak this afternoon. Thank you, Madam Chair Brooks and members of the

Committee, for holding this very important meeting. My name is Cecilia Thompson and I will be speaking based on my lived experience as that of now a senior who has mobility issues and my young man who is an adult living with severe autism and severe sensory issues.

As a former member of the School Board for the School District of Philadelphia, I always fought for behind the scenes individuals with disabilities, physical and neurodiverse because I feel like the neurodiverse conversation is left out because you can't see my son's challenge.

But nevertheless, it's nothing like looking at a 5'10" 230-pound man having a meltdown and trying to make sure that nobody mistakes his meltdown for anything other than him operating in his

disability. So I'm just going to share our lived experiences when we go to events.

Number one, can you please have more than three to five disability parking spots. No matter how early I try to get to an event to get that parking so I don't have to walk that far, there's always maybe three to five, maybe 10 spots for an event that has probably over 400 to 500 people.

As was stated earlier, we want to go to these events too. But it's just hard. At least it's hard for me to walk that far. And also for my son, I try to keep the distance short because I don't know when the meltdown is going to happen. So the shorter the distance, it prevents his meltdown.

Number two, please have seating for disabled participants

in an area where we can see the event. Again, when I go to these events, the seating for us is always in some place obscure where we can hear it, but we can't see it. There's usually a barrier, some type of pole and it was almost an afterthought, oh, we have to have these individuals here, let's just sit them any ole kind of where. That's how I feel when I go to these events.

Now, these aren't free events. I'm paying the same amount of money that everybody else is to enjoy these events, but now I can't see and I feel like me and my son are just stuck somewhere for two to three hours because he's constantly saying, I can't see, I can't see. And it's just, you know, now I'm trying to keep him calm because now we're not enjoying ourselves.

Please have the entrance

for our disabled participants near the event. Again, whenever I go to these events our entrance is so far away from the event and it's almost as if we're taken through a maze that I almost sometimes think, okay, I probably would have done better in the event for everybody else and just take my chair with me and sit down and then get in that way.

And also, with that event because I know security is paramount and it's essential, it appears that the individuals checking don't know what they're checking for, they're just checking and it just takes so long that at least I end up missing and everybody else in the line end up missing part of the event.

Again, we're paying money. These aren't free events, so I feel like any entrance for us,

you need to keep in mind the distance that we have to walk for those of us that have mobility issues.

Accessibility is more than those living in a wheelchair. For me accessibility includes those who are neurodiverse and living with like autism and ID and other places -- other exceptionalities. Again, when we go to events and I see the signs, me and my son sit there because we have to sit on the end, because in case he does have an issue, I can maneuver that better than sitting in the middle.

And sometimes I've been asked, you need to get up because this is for people with disabilities. I said, I am physically disabled and he has a neurodisability. I usually don't move. It's usually, you know, a fight that I don't feel like having

just for us to be comfortable. So whatever is going to go on with the city events, make sure they're including those with physical and those who are neurodiverse.

My son probably can't even go to none of what's going to happen in the city because of his severe sensory issues. And I know this is not going to happen, but you got to put it out there. Give the office of DBHIDS about $1 million to have separate events for those of us who have sensory issues. Accessibility is not always about being in the crowd. Sometimes at least for my son and people like him, he probably wants to enjoy the 250th birthday festivities, but he can't because of his severe accessory issues it's just not going to happen. So that money, the city will make that back 10 times and over, so we have

events for my Trevor so he can say he participated in the 250th birthday festivities.

I'm almost done. Any sensory spaces needs to be age-appropriate. Again, we try to participate in the sensory spaces. These spaces are for like 5- to 10-year-olds. They are not for -- he just turned 27, a 27-year-old grown man, and have more than one room. Again, when we've gone to the sensory spaces, because I have mobility issues it's so far to walk that I either have to stop or now, I'm anxious because I'm like, oh, my goodness, please don't let him have a meltdown before we get to the place that's going to calm him down.

And then I'm risking my health because now I'm out of breath, because for me what was probably a five-minute walk for

some people, for me it's like 15, 20 minutes. And training the people that when somebody says their child or the individual is having sensory overload, they are not having a behavior as a result of allegedly taking illegal substances.

The meltdown for us is family members -- and for me, I'm an older family member -- is real, is relevant and we are not saying to the people who are there to protect everybody else just because. Just give us the space so we can handle it and move on.

And as I, wrap this up, I was coming down here and I saw Eakins Oval, they had something this weekend. And they were taking down all those things that were part of the festivities where you can put ramps up and you can take ramps down. Ramps are not only for

those living in wheelchairs, but for people like me with mobility issues. We can't do all those steps. So just again, they can be put up, they can be put down again.

Thanks for the opportunity to share my lived experience. I'm doing this in the hopes that a change will occur for accommodations for those with physical and neurodiverse challenges. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you so much to this panel.

I want to recognize that our Council President Kenyatta Johnson is here in chambers today.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: And I have one question for this panel before I open up -- do you want to speak?

COUNCIL PRESIDENT

JOHNSON: (Nodded affirmatively).

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Okay.

COUNCIL PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I just wanted to come in and thank the Chairwoman for her leadership on this topic as we get prepared for 2026 and overall comprehensively take a look at how we are providing services for those who are disabled. Overall we know advocates were down here about a week ago regarding the Carousel House.

I have several different friends who used to go there play basketball who are disabled as a result of gun violence. I also see my good friend Chuck Horton, who is in the back who also used to head the Office of Disabilities for the City of Philadelphia. So I want to one let the Chairwoman know that anything I can do to be supportive

of your efforts moving forward, I'm here to do that.

And overall, we have to continuously make sure that this is a key priority because you don't have big time lobbyists walking the halls of City Council advocating and fighting on your behalf. You don't have big time lobbyists in the State House walking the halls of the State Capitol advocating on your behalf as well as in Congress, so we're at the front line.

And I thank again, Minority Leader Brooks, for taking the lead on this particular issue. It's something that I share passionately about just because I have several friends who have been disabled, particularly around the issue of gun violence and also the experience I went through just around housing as an elected official with a family member who

was disabled. And so, just because you make the phone call, you're elected official. No, we have to really advocate and fight on his behalf to make sure he received the type of support that he needed help in navigating.

So, Member Brooks, keep up the good work and whatever I can do to be supportive to help you advance and advocate and fight on behalf of those who are most needed, let me know.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Okay. Thank you so much, Council President.

COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: Thank you so much, Council President.

And before he leaves because his schedule is packed, I just wanted to recognize what leadership and having an open mind

on these issues mean. When Kenyatta Johnson first became Council President is when I started and we recognized that there was no way for people in a wheelchair to get up to this little riser up here if they're being honored by City Council. Had a conversation with him and his staff. He said, absolutely. And now, there is a ramp and there is a way to get up to the riser. Never before was that there.

So I just want to thank you for immediately jumping on that issue and making sure --

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you so much, Councilmember Landau. I have one question and then I'll open it up to my colleagues for questioning.

Do you think folks in the disability community feel

adequately engaged about 2026 and do you feel confident that your membership will be able to fully participate in each event? And that's open to the panel.

MS. THOMPSON: For those who are neurodiverse like my son that has sensory issues, no, he can't do it. Like I said earlier, if there can be events -- because he's not the only one -- for him, so that he can say, you know, I participated in these type of events because this is going to be a big celebration, it's going to be a fun celebration -- and I heard the young man next to me talking about having it virtual, but this is like a once-in-a-lifetime thing. You want to at least be able to go somewhere and say you did it, so I would give it a 0 for my son and his population.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS:

Thank you so much for that.

MR. VALDEZ: For me, I -- oh, sorry. For me, I think it comes back to what others have already said, who are you talking to, have you talked to members of the disability community and people with different types of disabilities, making sure that the full spectrum of the community and their perspectives are represented.

And then I think if, for the people that we serve if they feel listened to, if they feel engaged, then they'd be more likely to come. But again, it's going to come down to different barriers such as mainly transportation.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Transportation you said?

MR. VALDEZ: Yeah.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you.

MS. GONTEK: I do not

think we're ready for 2026 in terms of accessibility, but I really do want to thank and commend you, Madam Chair, for putting this hearing together because we have the who's who of all disability advocacy throughout the Southeastern Pennsylvania region, so these are the folks that we all need to continue to be talking about or talking with and who can connect us continually with their community members to give us the opportunity to continue to meet community members where they are and find out how we can get them to these events, how we can make sure that these events are for them and for everyone in the community. You have a really amazing network of resources right here in this room. So I encourage all members of Council to keep those lines of communication open.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you so much. I appreciate this panel.

Any questions from my colleagues?

COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: Just thank you all so much for everybody who's testified and will continue. We need to hear your voices so much.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you.

Mr. Varghese, can you please read the next panel? Thank you guys so much.

MS. THOMPSON: If I can make a request, can you ask somebody to fix the pushpads to get in here because it's very hard to get into that door and the pushpads?

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Yep, you just asked him. Somebody --

MS. THOMPSON: Oh, somebody did. Oh, I'm sorry.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: I'm looking around, but John will be on it.

MS. THOMPSON: Thank you.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you.

(Applause.)

THE CLERK: Will members of the fourth and final panel please come forward. Guy Anthony Brooks, Igor Camille and Amanda Perezo.

(Witnesses approached witness table.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Who's missing -- Amanda.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: She's not here.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: She's not here, okay. Thank you.

Good afternoon, everyone

and please state your name for the record and proceed with your testimony.

MR. CAMILLE: Hello. Thank you members of the Council. My name is Igor Camille. I use American Sign Language, also known ASL. I work as a deaf advocate at Liberty Resources, Liberty Resources often called LRI. And I want to share what communication access means to me and I want to share what this means to my deaf community as well.

When I go to City Hall for meetings, I often cannot participate because there is no interpreter. I and other deaf people have even had to leave meetings, important meetings, in regards to housing, in regards to SEPTA funding because accessibility was not provided. So having an interpreter is something that we

require. And if we have an interpreter, it means that we can fully participate and participate in these meetings that have meaningful impacts on our life.

I recognize this as a barrier. But I think it's also important for you to recognize that captioning and English is often a barrier to deaf individuals as well, because English and American Sign Language are not the same. If we are able to provide interpreters, even through video translation or live interpretation, that would give us the same information at the same time as everyone in the room.

Technology like video remote interpreting, often called VRI, can help you. However, only if that technology is working. However, the video gets frozen. The video blanks or freezes while

we're trying to use it and then it is inaccessible. That again leaves deaf individuals without access.

We need video relay systems that are high quality and dependable. That way we can communicate effectively and equally as our friends. And finally, when the City of Philadelphia holds press conferences or shares news on its TV channels, interpreters must be visible on the screen. This is not a luxury. It is access.

It ensures that deaf residents know what is happening in their city at the same time as their neighbors. Accessible communication is not optional. It is a civil right. Deaf people want to be included and deaf people deserve to be included. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. BROOKS: Thank you for giving me this opportunity to

speak to you, Councilmember Kendra Brooks. My name is Guy Anthony Brooks but we are not related. It's spelled G-u-y, A-n-t-h-o-n-y, B-r-o-o-k-s. I serve as Vice-chair of the Board of Liberty Resources, Inc., Philadelphia Center for Independent Living and I am a proud member of ADAPT, A-D-A-P-T, which is a grassroots organization for people with disabilities to be activists and advocate in their community as inclusive.

I am a wheelchair user. In less than two years, Philadelphia will welcome the world to the 2026 FIFA World Cup at Lincoln Financial Field. According to Visit Philadelphia, we expect half a million visitors. That is exciting but only if our city is prepared to include everyone, including the city's more than 25,000 residents with disabilities

as well as our incoming guests who have disabilities.

Liberty Resources and ADAPT are eager to work with the city's Office for People with Disabilities to ensure accessibility. It's not an afterthought, but a cornerstone for the planning process. Traffic and transportation will be critical issues during the World Cup. We need robust enforcement of traffic laws, especially illegal parking in bus lanes. For wheelchair users like me, crossing safely to a (inaudible) can be a matter of life and death.

Georgetown University Medical Center found that wheelchair users face a 36% higher risk of being killed in car/pedestrian crashes. This is because we are lower to the ground and harder to see. Clear,

protected bus lanes and enforcement are essential to reducing the risk and prevention of tragedy. Accessible parking will also be under intense demand.

We ask for heightened enforcement. Prevent illegal use of these spaces so that Philadelphians with disabilities and our visitors can get where they need to go. SEPTA too must be a partner as they break down every day in the city. During the World Cup that cannot be acceptable. Stations must be kept clean and maintained in good working order, with rapid response, with accessibility breakdown. Transportation network companies like Uber and Lyft should be cautioned to increase the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles.

When the city fills with tourists, riders with disabilities

cannot be left stranded. Traffic and transportation are not the only issue. Hotels and motels must also be prepared. That means more accessible rooms as well as simple accommodation features like shower seats for guests with the need. People with disabilities should be at the table in the planning process and the hospitality industry should reach out to us for this context.

Finally, the event itself must be accessible for all. Space must be available for people with disabilities, particularly wheelchair users and others who use mobility devices. Direct care workers accompanying ticketholders should be allowed free access to the venue. Direct care workers act in the same capacity as medical equipment and are needed for basic functions of living, such as eating

and toileting.

Direct care workers -- my apologies. Many people with disabilities would not be able to access the games without having their direct care worker in attendance. And requiring them to pay for an extra ticket simply to bring their attendant, their medical equipment along with them, to be a containment to discrimination.

Deaf and hard of hearing fans should have plenty visible ASL interpretation and subtitles on all screens for the games as well as video relay services, as my brother here mentioned everywhere vending is available, including ticket sales. Subtitles alone are not efficient. ASL and English are different languages and both interpretation and captioning are truly needed for inclusion.

Councilmembers, we thank you for your ongoing commitment to keeping Philadelphia clean, safe and inclusive. As we prepare for the World Cup, we urge you to put accessibility at the forefront so that when the world arrives, they see a city that is welcoming to everyone. Thank you, Councilwoman Kendra Brooks, for giving me this opportunity to speak to you all. Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you. Thank you so much. I have one question for the panel and then I'll open it up to my other committee members.

What do I have for you guys -- how do you think the city should ensure that our events are accessible? And are there steps that you think the city should be taking going forward?

MR. CAMILLE: I think training needs to be available. Like if a deaf person were to come up to a ticket booth, for example, how do they interact with that person, be it through writing, be it through a video interpreter as I've mentioned, having a video interpreter might be the best option for communication accessibility in those situations.

MR. BROOKS: As I am an activist and an advocate who lives in Philadelphia, I would love for us, people with disabilities, include us in the event planning. Let it come through the Office of People with Disabilities for Philadelphia and include the community. I'm not just speaking about me, but we are more than 25,000 just in the surrounding counties. So you can imagine the outer counties like Chester,

Delaware, Montgomery Counties who have people with disabilities, aged, growing, being born with disabilities. And if we cannot create accessibility today, when would we start creating accessibility. So we should start today.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you so very much for that. And I have one more thing.

Are there examples of past city events that you felt were particularly inaccessible? And are there examples of events that you felt that were done right under the ADA? And what went wrong and what did the city do well? That's what I'm trying to figure out. Are there any kudos for us to give to the city for any events that we've done?

MR. CAMILLE: Yes. The Eagles Super Bowl parade had the TV

screen set up. There were no interpreters on those screens however. There was nothing on there, and that was very frustrating. And I spent some time looking around to find an accessible screen and ended up getting lost in the crowd.

MR. BROOKS: Let's just go back to probably when the No Kings Rally happened in Philadelphia. I was part of the rally and we rode, we walked from City Hall all the way to Ben Franklin, to the library. We had everything accessible, the screen and interpreter was there. But there was one thing. The flag when it blows, it blocked the interpreter. And not just because I am an activist, but I consider all kinds of disabilities, be it invisible or physical. So imagine that I come with a friend who has

an invisible disability and cannot be accommodated or was accommodated, but did not see it from our point of view so we need to do better. Include him, include us. We got a lot of folks from the community here who will be happy to assist.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you so much for your testimony.

Do any of my colleagues -- I see a hand.

MR. CAMILLE: One more thing to mention, the recent SEPTA funding I don't know if you would call it a rally or not, but people gathered out in front of the building here. I showed up to participate in that and again, there was no interpreter provided. So I did took my phone out and do some texting just to communicate with some people around, but I felt

that my advocacy work was limited because I didn't have access to an interpreter in that situation. Thank you.

MR. BROOKS: I --

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Come on. Let's go. Let it roll.

MR. BROOKS: Let's take today this testimony and all that. There's a lady who is here who just acquired a hard-of-hearing disability and I noticed that we do not have any texting or screens around. She's on the phone right now reading the text of the C-SPAN page. But if we had accessibility programs here, even a television or even a screen that just gives out text, it would be awesome.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you so much for that. And it's so funny. I realized that today too. I was, like, that's missing. So I want to thank you so

much for your testimony, taking time out to be a part of this hearing.

Do any of my colleagues have any questions?

COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: I have one question and one comment.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Councilmember Landau.

COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: I want to follow up on the aide who comes to an event with someone. Is there any venue in the city, not just venue, an event, a sporting event, a concert, wherever where the aide can attend for free because they're there working to assist someone with a disability?

MR. CAMILLE: None that I'm aware of.

MR. BROOKS: Same here, not that I am aware of. But this is where we integrate/involve all the ideas and aspects and solutions

in making things accessible. So, yeah, my PCA would love to come with me, my personal care attendant, my direct care worker. Those are the names we call them because they are the ones who take care of us when nobody is around to take care of us. So if we are going to an event, be it social or private or even going to a restaurant, accessing public spaces, an attendant would definitely come because we all have disabilities, which are different. So if I have my attendant with me, I'll have more freedom, more liberty to do what I need to get done.

COUNCILWOMAN LANDAU: Thank you. I just wanted one comment to say. Thank you so much for having us. Imagine what a fully accessible Philadelphia can look like. I really can see this

moment in my head where we have such a successful 2026 that not only are the plans laid out ahead of time, that folks with disabilities know they can come to Philadelphia, but that they leave here knowing that we did it right and they can't wait to come. So thanks for -- you gave us a gift today and you also gave us a task and we're going to work really hard to follow up on it.

MR. BROOKS: May I just put this out there. We know that we are a large nation. We have different cultures, different languages and all that and we do have to think about safety, not just publicly but privately.

Even we have this issue about gun violence, it's affecting almost each and every one of us in different ways, maybe a friend, a family member or just a mistaken

identity could, so we need to put that in the forefront way of creating a safe space. Even those who have gone through it can still be involved in the community, but not excluding them. Let them know they are still welcome. It doesn't matter what happened, but you're still around with us.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you so very much for this.

Are there any questions -- actually, this concludes the panel testimony for this resolution.

We will now begin hearing from individuals who registered to provide public comment and we ask that you keep your comments down to no longer than two minutes.

Mr. Varghese, will you please read the names of the first people registered for public

comment. Thank you.

THE CLERK: There are 13 individuals signed up for public comment. Due to the number of speakers, each person may have up to two minutes for their comment or up to the time necessary for those with whom we have arranged special accommodations.

May T. Green, Shane Janick and Michael Anderson, please come to the podium.

(Witnesses approached witness table.)

THE CLERK: May T. Green Shane Janick and Michael Anderson please come to the podium.

(Witnesses approached witness table.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Please proceed.

MS. GREEN: Good morning -- I mean, good afternoon. I'm sorry. Okay. My name is T.

Green and I'm speaking -- I want to hurry up because she said two minutes and that's a concern for me, because as a caregiver I had to come all the way down to City Council. I actually had to come out my pocket and pay $12 for Uber, and to come down here for two minutes is really the crux of my statement and my request of City Council today.

Okay. We have a campaign going called Philly Voices Without Barriers, and I want to say good afternoon to Councilwoman, Kendra Brooks and the Committee on People with Disabilities Community and Special Needs. Usually I speak from the cuff, but I want to read this into the record. Okay.

For the record, this is an urgent request for hybrid access to public meetings in Philadelphia, i.e., City Council Stated meetings,

Land Bank and public hearings.

Okay. On behalf of Philly Voices Without Barriers Campaign, we write or we urge the Philadelphia City Council to take immediate and decisive action to ensure hybrid access to all public meetings.

Ensuring democratic participation in government is a fundamental right, yet many individuals face barriers that prevent them from attending public meetings in person. Our campaign is rooted in a simple but powerful belief, civic participation should never be limited to physical, financial or logistic barriers.

Inperson-only meetings exclude many Philadelphians. For too many Philadelphians, working families, seniors, people with disabilities, caregivers, low-income residents, sick and ill, homebound and bed-bound patients,

stay at home parents with little kids, no child care options, shift workers, workers with flexibility schedules, continued COVID-19 variants, health risk and immune compromise and financial constraints, these citizens face real obstacles and barriers to attending inperson meetings from transportation costs, work conflicts to mobility challenges.

Facing significant barriers to attend meetings in person, without remote options like hybrid virtual their voices are excluded from critical government decisions that shape our community. Technology has made inclusive participation more feasible. Hybrid meetings empower residents to engage in civic dialogue, voice concerns and stay informed regardless of physical limitations or financial constraints. This

aligns with the Council's commitment to transparency, fairness and inclusive governance.

Hybrid virtual access is not a convenient. It is a necessity. It allows residents to engage with their government voice and stay informed regardless of where they are and what challenge they face. It's a critical step to equality, transparency and inclusive. We respectfully request that the committee introduce or support legislation mandating hybrid access, virtual access to all public meetings. Ensure accessibility features such as capturing language translation and mobile-friendly platforms; prioritize outreach to communities historically excluded from the process.

I don't have that much more to read. Philadelphia has the

technology, the talent and the moral imperative to lead on this issue, as demonstrated by implementing hybrid virtual access for zone meetings, Board of Adjustments meetings, hearings where new luxury development, wealthy developers and property owners go to have their projects review and approve.

Is it fair that the city was able to install and implement hybrid virtual access for developers and their lawyers? Yet when it comes to critical government policies at City Council, Stated meetings, public hearings and Land Bank where city properties are being disposed, there is no hybrid virtual access.

The Land Bank actually have their meetings at 10 o'clock in the morning. And who can really get down here 10 o'clock in the

morning. Let us not allow outdated systems or certain political entities to silence the voice that deserves to be heard. Philly Voices Without Barriers Campaign advocates that current inperson-only format or public meetings is exclusionary.

These Philadelphia citizens are deeply affected by the decisions made by Council chambers government meetings and they are being denied the opportunity to participate due to circumstances beyond their control. Okay. We thank you for your service, City Council and Philly Voices Without Barriers Campaign urge the City Council to act swiftly to make public meetings hybrid, virtual access to all public and truly public for everyone.

And I say all that to say with SEPTA increasing your

rates to now -- it's really $3. It's $2.97 so $3.00. If you have to catch two buses, that's $6.00 up, $6.00 back. I say this to the Mayor, Council President Kenyatta Johnson and to the committee here. With all due respect, okay, many times -- you all are on the clock, okay, people have to take off from work to come down here. They have to spend $12 to come down and go back. They're not going to stop in town to really go to a restaurant, because we've heard the argument about remote access, but that's not really where it's at.

It's about having compassion for people who really a lot of times have experiences without their control. You don't know tomorrow if you go to doctor if you're going to get a diagnosis of cancer or kidney. You have people who have kidney dialysis,

who go for cancer treatment, but there might be a bill that they feel is impactful. They should be able to pick up their phone and testify without having to come all the way down City Council for two minutes. To come down here for two minutes and spend $12.00 is really inconsiderate to those of us in the disability and on those of us who have barriers to coming down in person. Okay.

And one more thing I want to say. The curbcuts, I would like to request that City Council provide some type of clear banner with the curb cuts like in the neighborhood so people would not park. So when people with a disability, wheelchairs come out, you can't go to the house, you don't know whose car it is to park there. You don't know whose house it is.

But if you put like a little plastic banner, clear banner, I have in mind, where you say, disability ramp $300 penalty ticket, that might make a difference for them parking in a ramp, because you don't want to come home from an event 8 o'clock, 9 o'clock and they're parked in the ramp. So that's the second one.

But I really ask Councilwoman Brooks, I know you're with Working Families and this is really imperative. We're asking if you would help create the legislation or your committee and put this through ASAP. Before we talk about events, let's talk about everyday living access for our community that's showing the world who's going to come here in 2026 that you care about the disability and those who have barriers to the civic process.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you so much for your testimony and somebody in my office will follow up with you.

MS. GREEN: Yes, I've been in contact with Mr. Russo and also Jonathan. So hopefully, we can meet and talk about this and I really appreciate that. Thank you.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you so much.

MR. ANDERSON: Going back to your question, Councilwoman, if you get free admission to a lot of venues around Philadelphia, because I was the one that know you get free admissions but it's not well publicized. So you have to go on the website to see if the venues are accessible. But a lot of the venues are tickets for free. But now, let's go on to my testimony.

MR. JANICK: I'll just

mention, so some venues do have that policy widely it's just making it widely publicized.

MR. ANDERSON: You have to go through it on the website or you have to be in the know. But if you ask, a lot of venues do have free attendance tickets. So I'm going to talk about my experiences on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. Good afternoon. My name is Michael Adamson and I'm here today to speak about an issues that affects not just me, but thousands of Philadelphians with disabilities, accessible parking during major city events such as the fireworks and all that.

I want my city to have major public events. I urge the city to make accessible parking for all public events. Venues like the Benjamin Franklin Parkway and Art Museum steps, their designated

drop-off, that is not enough for individuals like me who require 24-hour care. Drop off is not as smooth. If I need a drink or I need to go to the restroom or I need to move, it doesn't work so I must be left alone while my aide searches for parking many blocks, and that makes things even more difficult. When the event is over, everyone else is trying to get away and my attendant is trying to get towards me. To drive against the traffic when my van to come and pick me up, so instead of using a drop-off, so my attendant and I need to park more than 10 blocks away, which can mean up to a 30-minute walk in my wheelchair. That does not just involve -- it's just exhausting. And I'd say it excludes my attendant that works tirelessly that supports me that also expects to push me on uneven

and broken sidewalk that is not only difficult to navigate but sometimes dangerous, and what could be life-threatening. These experiences should be joyful and experience to physically and emotionally.

While I'm not asking for special treatment, I'm asking for equal access and the ability to participate in Philly cultural and civic and social life in my city just like anybody else. Whenever it's a parade or concert, I should be able to attend without facing public barriers. I don't even have to think about -- I know that there is not abundance of street parking, but we can buy out the lots and reserve them for only people with disabilities.

I hope you will not hear my words but act on them, because when you make decisions about

infrastructure, transportation and event planning, you're deciding on who gets to show up and who gets left behind. And too often I don't go to these events because of parking. Please don't leave me blind.

Thank you for the opportunity of having me speak today. And for instance, I wanted to go to the Eagles game but I couldn't even go. My dad said it was too crowded. So if we could buy a parking lot just for people with disabilities, it would be a short walk to the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. That would be greatly appreciated.

Shane Janick, do you want to say anything?

MR. JANICK: I'll second everything, and then I'm up next.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MR. ANDERSON: I think buy out parking for special events and on the Parkway. I love to go to the Parkway but drop-offs do not work for people who require 24 hour care. Sometimes we get lost in the traffic and lost in the chaos.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you so much for your testimony.

MR. ANDERSON: I would like to meet with you, Councilwoman Brooks or anybody on the committee. I would be willing to come down and talk about my infrastructure. So when big events come to Philadelphia, I can come without any problem. I'll give you my card or anything.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Yep, I already asked my staff to come over here and talk to you

about the website and some other things that you mentioned, so somebody will be following up with you right after.

MR. JANICK: Thank you, Council. My name is Shane Janick. I'm the Executive Director for the Arc of Philadelphia. We're part of the largest advocacy network for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. I'm actually here not in my role today, but I'm actually a younger brother to David Janick. He has severe intellectual disabilities. Facility requires 24/7 supervision and care, has some physically complex disabilities as well, some behavioral health concerns.

And just wanted to second that Mike's issue on drop-off zones simply are not the solution to address ADA compliance, because not only for people with

physical disabilities, but also people with intellectual disabilities that require that require that level of 24/7, assistance. The same barriers exist across disability.

So I think it was interesting that we heard today one of the solutions from one of the speakers on the first committee was drop-off zones and --

MR. ANDERSON: They do not work. I use them a thousand times. They do not work.

MR. JANICK: Yeah, simply just people can't be left alone. So just wanted to highlight that that particular issue crosses all disability. And the same barriers exist for people like my brother. Second too, I think any chance that we can create access for these events, not only is an economic opportunity to increase

the market for people with disabilities across the city, but it also promotes positive health outcomes for all residents.

And as we know, one in four residents with a disability is at a disadvantage for poor health outcomes. I really hope that we can look at event access, not just as events but really a public health issue. If we can look at this in a public health lens, we can actually decrease cost of health care systems across the board that we know are going to be strained year over year, especially with some of the political dialogue that's going on that will feel a ripple effect for really decades to come.

So I just want to hope that we can also use a public health lens and think of these things not as leisure and events,

but really the health of the city. Thank you.

MR. ANDERSON: We don't want it to work bad. We want it to work good next year.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Mr. Varghese, are there any more individuals?

THE CLERK: May Nico Meyering, Angie Fuoco, Ari Trey Masters and Julie Platt, please come up to the podium.

(Witnesses approached witness table.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Can you please introduce yourself and begin your testimony please.

MS. FUOCO: Hello. So thank you for having us here. Thank you, Councilwoman Brooks and all you Councilmembers. My name is

Angie Fuoco. I work at the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia and I'm so thankful to be here, invited by Nico, whom I've met out there in digital space actually and found out he was here in Philadelphia.

So I came here thinking one thing and ended up with different messages that I've given before. To me, accessibility is love. It's love for your neighbor as well as love for yourself. And we're in the great city of Philadelphia. Excuse me, I have only been here two years so I'm an excited newbie, and I'm excited that we're hosting the world next year.

I happened to be in Atlanta for the 1996 Olympics and was a volunteer there and hosted the world and it's the most exciting. And it's the most amazing thing when you can share

that love to people who don't often get it. And top of the list of that is people with disabilities because we don't get our needs for access or accessibility met. So thank you for this. I want to volunteer. I want to sign up and help however I can.

I'm also a trained ADA coordinator and I noticed some things I'd like to help you with here in Philadelphia, in this room, in fact. Alon and I have talked already. And there are things that are in the works that are kind of quasi on the cusp of the future, but we know with technology the future is now, so let's get going.

Excuse me, my phone went down. Communication access is huge and I have been struggling with it for the past three hours and 15 minutes. I only called in yesterday to say that I wanted to

speak, but I want you all to be prepared in the future so that someone can call in or maybe even text in, because maybe calling in isn't so accessible and you need another accessible route.

Thankfully I can hear well when I go right to my hearing aid and Bluetooth and my cochlear implant. But across this room everything was lost. So for two hours when I didn't know that the captions were on the C-SPAN, I was unable to hear anything but 1 out of 20, any words.

So captions too are an accessibility feature that reaches more than just people with hearing loss. They reach people with autism, people with learning disabilities, people who are learning other languages, people who have attention deficit disorder and lack of focus. They bring them

back in.

So I would say please caption every event indoors and out. In fact, I think you were there, Kendra, at the Wawa ceremony out on the mall right across from the Mint and I noticed the interpreter there, but I couldn't hear anything, nothing, nothing. Hearing aids and cochlear implants work about 3 to 6 feet if there's no noise, no interference, all kinds of issues.

So I want you to keep in terms of constant backup and multiple paths, even though at 3 o'clock I got the C-SPAN up for me and the captions came in, but then my power went out or the C-SPAN power went out, even though I still had internet I believe. I've been trying to fool with that for the last 15 minutes. So you see all the different situations we

can run into. We have to plan in multiple, multiple ways of falling back on things when the technology fails.

And I want to say that the most important thing is the knowledgeable and caring people who are going to share the love of Philadelphia next year and today. So thank you to the people who helped me today. I want to say that. We can translate using captions in other languages. Oh, isn't that amazing.

We can beam to phones. We can have a projection. We can have different ways people need. We can make sure people have power to have their assistive devices powered all the time. We need to do that. Teach everyone a few words in ASL because ASL is one of the most commonly used sign languages throughout the world, and

we can of course welcome our deaf community first off as well as welcome others.

So have volunteers just learn a few words, welcome or some other kind words. Have them have the pen and paper, because when my computer or my computer here actually, smartphone went down, I needed pen and paper to communicate even with people here.

So the last thing I want to suggest is a product called Welcome that a friend of mine, whom I met via LinkedIn, how I met Nico, has developed in Scotland. And in Scotland, the Parliament of Scotland is actually using this product. It is an app. I'm not selling it. I have no vested interest in it other than seeing the needs of the people of Philadelphia first and then the people who visit here met in a way

that doesn't put them off, that doesn't keep them in the dark for two hours or in silence for two hours where they're there, but they're not even being served in the needs they need. And this is product that does that.

It teaches people how to be welcoming, the volunteers, the workers and the city workers themselves. I challenge the City of Philadelphia to look into this product with me and I will connect you to this person, because as people with disabilities we all know the fails and the fails just stay with us the rest of our lives.

I flew to Dublin to a conference hosted by our beautiful Senator Harkin who helped usher in the Americans with Disabilities Act. He had three languages of interpretation there. He had Irish Sign Language, ASL and British Sign

Language there at the meeting, but they didn't have captions. I was locked out of a meeting that I spent lots of money to go overseas to go for. So those are the kind of fails that we want not to happen. I cried when I was in their beautiful city hall in Dublin and I couldn't hear because of the echo and I had no captions beaming to me.

So I want to say please, please consider that, consider me your ally. I'm so happy to be here today. I'd love to introduce you to this product which trains people to be the front lines. We always say, oh, well, we have an app for that, you know, but the app fails. And I'm thankful for Vincent who came over here and did his best, and Alon, but really it's people. And the more they know, the more you can teach them how to be

accessible and welcoming to people is really the greatest thing you can do and the greatest love we can show in Philadelphia. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. MEYERING: Hi, everyone. Chair, members of the committee, today, like all days, is a good day for disability inclusion. My name is Nico Meyering and I'm honored to speak with you all today. I regret that all of City Council could not be here.

Philadelphia is about to host a once-in-a-lifetime year, certainly in my lifetime. We'll welcome the FIFA World Cup, an All Star game of baseball -- I'm a basketball guy, so I don't know much about that -- and a full year of America's 250th celebration across every single neighborhood. These events will be loud, large

and joyous and they will tax and stress every system that we have.

Here in Philadelphia every issue is a disability issue and every system is a disability system. Every system in our city must be accessible. Accessibility cannot be an afterthought. It really has to be page one. And as lucky as I am to sit here today to speak with you, I can't help but think that the best time for this hearing was 6 months ago or maybe 12 months ago.

First, I'll go into a bit about the why this is important. 17% of Philadelphians, over 245,000 of us, have at least one disability. That's me, that's my friends up here and in the back and possibly some of you standing up there, sitting up there. 245,000 of us, that's our neighbors, our families, people we

love, people who employ us and who we employ. Disabled people like me, maybe like you, live all over Philadelphia.

Second, we have some fairly high stakes, right. We know some things that we can fix, signage and wayfinding, for one. Getting into City Hall was quite difficult, even for me because I didn't know where to go. And I've been in City Hall in this room before. Imagine how difficult it would be for somebody who is low vision or blind, who is hard of hearing or deaf or who simply has not been here before. Our events need clear, high contrast signs, plain language and consistent symbols.

Effective communication is not optional. We all know that. We also suffer, disabled people here in Philadelphia, from

dangerous or inaccessible pathways. Earlier this year PPA was doing a great job of hauling cars out of South Philadelphia that had been parked on sidewalks, parked on top of curbcuts, which destroy our curbcuts (inaudible) and hauled them away. But somehow that's really dropped off. We must accelerate safe and continuous routes to and throughout our event sites and our event routes.

Another thing that we can do is improve our transit reliability. I'm aware that SEPTA drives majority of its funding from Harrisburg, but Philadelphia can coordinate things like accessible shuttles, clearly signed step-free detours and other workarounds around barriers that I feel must become standard.

And if we do this, and we must do it together, my friends,

not piecemeal but together, we stand to benefit quite a bit. Disabled people like me, and maybe like some of you have money, and we enjoy spending money. I don't know about you. But after a long day dealing with inaccessible systems, nothing perks me up like some retail therapy, right.

Disabled people have about $490 billion of spending power all across the U.S. Think about how many billions that will be here in the city next year. When we're here in the city, we want to spend that money on food, hotels, transit, merchandise. I'm sure we all want to have some 2026 anniversary World Cup uniforms, right.

So here's what I'm asking the committee to do now. First, no plan, no permit. Every event should have an accessibility

plan. Every vendor and contractor should also have an accessibility plan. Any procurement, any RFP, any contract or milestone with a city contractor that does not plan for access means that they also plan to not do business with the city, right. Plain and simple. We can be Darwinian about this. No access plan, no disability inclusion, no business with the city. It's very simple.

We can also mandate onsite accessibility leads for our events. We can publish plain language, screen reader-friendly digital updates and program guides. Of course we should also have the information available physically. And in general, understanding that there's multiple ways of communication, multiple ways to disseminate information and it's our responsibility and if we do it

right, our joy to help people gain that access with communication.

As I wind my time down, I want to re-emphasize we support the Phillies, we sure as heck support the Eagles and that means that we can certainly support disabled Philadelphians, like me, like my friends up here. Every issue is a disability issue and disability advocacy is something we have the joy of doing every single day. So thank you. I leave you with love and I leave with access. It is a good day for disability inclusion.

(Applause.)

MR. MASTERS: Hello. My name is Ari Trey Masters. There have been a lot of people who have talked a lot and I know that we're kind of running over so I'll try to keep this brief. I work as a CAPSS, which is a community autism

peers support specialist with mental health partnerships. And I've been really honored to be able to be here and speak with you, but also to hear how inclusive even this disability panel has been.

We've seen people with more physical disabilities, but the conversation that also surrounded neurodiversity, I found to be really useful. And so, I just wanted to give some more help and support about how that can be better with autism, at least from my own experience.

One of the things that I really enjoy about being in Philadelphia, specifically in the autism space, is that we're actually the first certified sensory inclusive city from culture city. I don't know if you know this, but it's pretty cool. As it approaches as we're doing the 2026,

just making sure that we're able to keep up that accessibility and making sure that that the space is -- what's it called -- friendly for everyone to be in.

A good example of this, which also can be really big in 2026, is Lincoln Financial which has a lot of really great autism things. So I just want to highlight them so that we can try to spread that those specific things out. Lincoln Financial Field has a sensory room which is really useful. It also has a decompression room. A really important thing if you're trying to be friendly for autistic people is to have both of those things, because in my experience some autistic people like to stim, which is very loud, and other autistic people don't want to be in a very loud space at all. So having

spaces for people to both get out the excess energy that they have and also have a space like come back in is very useful.

They have a mobile sensory unit. And so, having those stationed at different events could be very useful just to give people spaces to calm down so they're not going to be too overwhelmed. Sensory bags and having staff assistance is also very useful. There's been a mention of having support people provided free access so that they're able to be with the people.

My role in my job is to be kind of that for other autistic people to help them navigate the world and to help the world navigate them. I just want to thank you again for thinking about us and including us in this process, having us here and having

us continue with you I think is a very important part to make sure that this 2026 celebration is as accessible for all the people that are going to be there. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. PLATT: Hey, everybody. Can you hear me? I'm just gonna make this really quick. I also just want to say as someone that's new to crutches, I will say that navigating through City Hall was really difficult and there's a lot that I think we can improve on, especially for someone who's been here many times. So, yeah, just wanted to go all of that.

So I'm going to follow one of my colleagues over here, but I think many people know me. I'm Julie Platt. I'm the new Director of Policy and External Affairs at Mental Health Partnerships, and I wanted to thank Councilmember

Brooks and everyone here for their leadership in ensuring that 2026 is accessible to those with disabilities and mental health partnerships.

We work with individuals with various mental health challenges, but at our core we provide peer-driven support services, certified training and community advocacy. So as we've talked about, 2026 is a massive year for Philadelphia but we want to make sure that it's accessible for everyone, especially those with hidden disabilities such as autism, suspense, substance use disorder, ADHD and other mental health challenges that may not be apparent at first glance.

So here are some suggestions from some people that we work with at Mental Health Partnerships to make sure that 2026

is inclusive for those with disabilities. First is to ensure that marketing materials are accessible for everyone. This involves creating inclusive content that is easy to understand for individuals with diverse disabilities such as plain language, alternative formats and color contrast. And then of course captioning and transcripts would ensure accessibility for all and we can definitely start with that when you're trying to testify at City council, maybe having those when you're walking up the stairs to City Council or when you're going through security. That would be a good step to work on that.

Second thing that I'm going to talk about is just that many individuals we work with are in active recovery and many events, you know, as the All Star Game and

FIFA really revolve around a drinking culture. And so, we want to ask that planners of these events ensure that there are areas where those who might be in recovery can still enjoy the festivities while not being surrounded by alcoholic beverages or making sure that there's nonalcoholic beverages that are available to people.

And then just wanted to echo what my colleague said over here about our CAPS program, which is the Community Autism Peer Support program. We again commend the Eagles for supporting the autistic community through their sensory room and we would like to see more of those sensory rooms at other events and outdoor festivals that are happening in 2026. So thanks so much, guys. And, yeah, thank you.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you guys so much for this panel. I appreciate the time that you've come to speak to City Council.

Mr. Varghese, can you please read the next speakers.

THE CLERK: May Lydia Cooper, Mike Martin and Tamar Riley, please come to the podium. I will add that given that we must conclude our hearing at 5 o'clock today, I'm going to politely ask that we keep public comment brief or summarize your points as best as you can. Thank you.

Lydia Cooper, Mike Martin and Tamar Riley, please come to the podium. May Colleen Ott and Roz McKelvey, please come to the podium.

(Witnesses approached witness table.)

THE CLERK: And May David Kosh please come to the podium.

(Witnesses approached witness table.)

MS. RILEY: Good afternoon, Councilmembers. My name is Tamar Riley and I serve on the Carousel House Advisory Council. I also have a son who's intellectually disabled and who has been attending Carousel House for well over 30 years so it has a special connection in my heart for me.

I'm here today to publicly highlight the importance of prioritizing the Carousel House Rebuild project. This is essential so that people with disabilities have a dedicated space for social and recreational programs, many of which were discontinued following the permanent closure of the

Carousel House in June of 2021.

In May of '21 during a written question-and-answer session with Parks and Recreation, the Advisory Council was told that the new facility would be completed within 24 to 36 months and assured that Carousel House had already been prioritized on the Rebuild list. However, it is now October 25. Yet the building remains untouched with no evident progress.

While some programs have found temporary new locations, others have not. For instance, our youth wheelchair basketball program, originally founded at the Carousel House, was promised in an alternative venue by PPR but has yet to receive one. As a result, the youth must travel to New Jersey to practice and play games. The programs that were relocated are confined to a limited space,

sharing a small recreational center with the surrounding community.

In conclusion, I would like to ask City Council to urge Rebuild once again to honor its commitments and begin restoring work on the Carousel House. It's been far too long. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MS. OTT: Good afternoon -- sorry. I had the same problem last time when I spoke versus using my actual device that read for me last time. So good morning, Councilperson Brooks and Harrity, who were left here. And hi, Speakerperson. I had been asked before to speak and Alon asked me on the date of September 27, and that was the day that I called.

So the fact that I'm sitting here versus with the other folks earlier -- okay, we'll forget

about it. I had put in the proposal when Alon said, hey, I would like you to speak. So I had wrote up this thing called Made for Autistics, A Sensory-Friendly City.

Now, we know that this past March the Autistic Art Coalition of Philadelphia, which I'm the founder of, CEO and I'm a CAPS. In March, we were given the proclamation, per for Madam Mayor, for Intellectual and Developmental Disability Acceptance Month back-to-back. We received the Autism Acceptance Month Resolution from City Council.

When I got home that day, I didn't know this was going to happen. In my mailbox I received a proclamation per Shapiro that was a surprise, but those are words, notes. Philadelphia does a great job, great job with the disability community. As we heard,

there are some improvements that need to be had. But Philadelphia is on the forefront.

I have one thing that is not in this proposal that I will give to Alon Gur because somebody had mentioned about cobblestones. I'm a fan of cobblestones even though I'm a great fall risk. Anyhow, there is a groundbreaking, no pun intended, thing that goes above cobblestones temporarily, and it is a material on the top that is flat, obviously good for individuals in wheelchairs. But the inside texture that keeps the cobblestones pristine, as they were before you put it down, has this kinetic sand inside and then the bottom is a canvas, non-slip, non-move. They utilize this in New Zealand and sometimes in the UK. Though we never see it, it's probably the same color of the

ground.

But to get back on here, more can be done within the autism community as well as obviously other communities. I already said that. Sorry about the repeat. I noticed that when earlier with the hearing that some of the points that I had put in here, and then Alon said during the break that they were incorporated into your paperwork. So that was awesome. Thanks for listening and reading. But I'm just going to go back to my two points here:

Language is key. On a city level, it is great when people talk about certain individuals and stuff. When people talk like myself or others, I may not use the words but others do and that's okay. But for a city level, shouldn't it be differences versus issues and stay away from negative

language like issues.

The other thing I have here, and I will end with this and somebody had just mentioned it earlier prior and I will mention it again, our group goes from ages 4 to 64. That's all we have now within those age ranges. We have not seen anybody since. But if they come, we will welcome them with open arms as well.

When it comes to these sensory spaces, I have to second that most of them are made for individuals who are knee-high to a grasshopper. Not my age, which is above 45. Next.

(Applause.)

MS. McKELVEY: I believe he's next. I was last.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Hello, Councilmembers. I'm originally from Washington, D.C., lived there for 37 years and I've

moved here just eight years ago. I'm here to comment about emergency preparedness and emergency announcements on the television here. I don't see interpretation provided on screen. I know sometimes there is an interpreter provided because I can see their elbow off to the side of whoever's speaking, but the interpreter is not often shown onscreen with the speaker.

The captioning, and I'm sorry to say this, but the captioning sometimes you see language like, and I'm sorry to say this, but you might see the words fuck you come up in the captions and that's not what someone is saying. Sometimes you might see the words printed that say beep, which means that the caption is then censoring out the language that they're hearing. It is not

the same access as having an American Sign Language interpreter on screen.

Now, to have someone on screen doesn't mean that that is good enough. You need a qualified and certified interpreter to be on screen to give these emergency directions and announcements. Often during COVID times, we saw the use of deaf interpreters as well that support various types of individuals who use sign language. And that is my comment.

It is very, very critical for our community, especially in emergencies. Often in emergency situations I have friends who call me to say, I saw the news, what's going on, and we then are within our community disseminating information. If an interpreter was on screen and not cut off of the screen but on the

screen for us to have access to, then we'd have access to that information just like everybody else.

(Applause.)

MS. McKELVEY: Hello. My name is Rosalind McKelvey from Germantown Deaf Ministries Fellowship, a deaf advocacy group, and I thank you all for being here and also for Councilwoman Landau, who's helped me in many situations. I'm also representing, not officially, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Functional Needs Subcommittee that helps with the Red Cross and FEMA and P.J. (inaudible) who's our representative to FEMA.

I'm only here -- I will not repeat all of the information. I give great appreciation for the comment of the deaf man who spoke. I can sign, but these are wonderful

interpreters for us today and I give you praise. The short things that I would like to give to you, one is if you can feel the frustration of people who are deaf but do not speak English, Wo shuohua Putonghua. I just said I speak Chinese. Yo hablo Espanol -- and when someone's coming here to Philadelphia, they read lips. So we're asking that, as he said, please use certified or qualified interpreters that know how to speak and understand the different languages coming in.

We also are going to hop down to thank you, SEPTA, for allowing us to have our aides come free on SEPTA. Then we get to situations and find out they cannot come in with us. The toileting skills, the help they need is not allowed. And I agree, you need to say whether you're accessible or

not.

But on CCT, the deaf and the deaf blind are held hijacked. They get on and think they have a short ride and it turns into two hours. No bathroom break and they do not know where they're going. So these drivers cannot talk the languages.

Moving on down to, as he said, the emergency wards. VRI, the little screen, if a deaf person has an eye issue, semi-comatosed or is drowsy, I work as a chaplain in a hospital, the nurses walk in and say, oh, they're sleeping, and they have brain tumors, things as such. So the VRI -- and Igor is (inaudible) on it. It is not always good for a deaf person on a screen when they have a stroke and their hand is off camera and you cannot see they're trying to tell you they're in pain and they try to

use families.

So inperson interpreters are requested by the deaf in all these emergency situations, and when the caregivers have an emergency, they leave to go to their families and the people that need help do not have even their caregiver in an emergency situation. So please consider that when we're inviting people from out of town, that the caregivers are going to leave their clients. And they're the ones with the telephones.

Last but not least, using in emergency situations people who are not qualified, sometimes we go past -- I'm a religious interpreter, but using the abuser of people when they're the ones who know how to sign or know another language is not appropriate in any language to use

the interpreter and family members. So please let's work together as they say on finding solutions for these and thank you.

I'm going to hold my comments there to say Germantown Deaf Ministries is willing to be a deaf advocate for any language if we can help you. Free lessons. Thank you so much for your time.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Did you want to say something?

MS. McKELVEY: Yield back.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I do. I think this is important to mention. Because some people don't understand the vocabulary and the intricacies of the English language, interpreters help to bridge that gap and it's very helpful.

Something that's very

annoying are certain signs. There's a sign, for example, that looks like the old sign for a disc, like a CD, but an interpreter I saw on screen used it to mean drugs or medication. That causes a major communication issue. There is an evolution of signs being used and people change and use different signs depending on where you're from and that then causes additional complications. We need people who are using the appropriate use of American Sign Language when we're providing this access.

MS. McKELVEY: And thank you to Channel 10 and 3 who are trying their best to go past union rules because the camera men are supposed to get head shots, and I have a group of people who call in and say we cannot see the interpreter. They don't like hear

me calling, but they will pull back within minutes and show the interpreter on screen.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Speaking of the Eagles Super Bowl Parade earlier, there was a woman who was signing and she signed on the National Anthem. You could see her elbow, but I couldn't see her. The deaf community was outraged. This is important, very important. Thank you for listening.

(Applause.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: Thank you all. Thank you all so much for your testimony.

Are there any additional individuals registered for public comment?

THE CLERK: There are no more individuals registered for public comment.

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: There being no further questions

from members of the committee and no other witnesses to testify, is there anyone else present in this hearing whose name we have failed to call that wishes to offer testimony on the resolution being considered today?

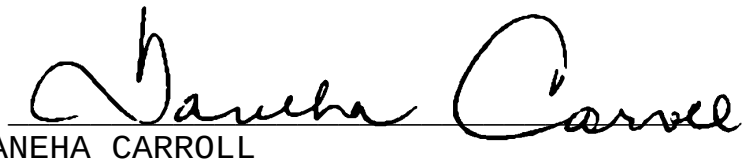
(No response.)

COUNCILWOMAN BROOKS: I want to thank all the panels and witnesses for their participation today. We value your opinion. This concludes the public hearing of the committee. We will now recess this hearing until the call of the Chair and thank you all so very much for your attendance.

(Committee on People with Disabilities and Special Needs concluded at 4:49 p.m.)

C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I, hereby certify that the proceedings and evidence noted are contained fully and accurately in the stenographic notes taken by me in the foregoing matter, and that this is a correct transcript of the same.



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Court Reporter - Notary Public

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