



February 9, 2016

To the Commissioners of the Cook County Board:

My name is Adam Ballard and I am the Manager of Organizing and Policy at Access Living.

On behalf of Access Living, I would like to commend Cook County on its efforts to make offices here in this building ADA compliant. Not only the County Board Room but all of the County offices in this building need to be accessible to people with a wide range of disabilities. We at Access Living are very pleased at the County's desire to be in line with disability rights law, and to be inclusive of everyone who lives in our County, including every member of the Board and everyone who works here.

It is important to remember that all Cook County offices are places where many kinds of people come and go to do business. The Board Room is an obvious example because it is where public proceedings are held. However, the County is also an equal opportunity employer, and it also contracts with contractors on an equal opportunity as well. Every level of County government should be accessible and inclusive, for employees, community partners, contractors and the public. That means the physical space must match the desire to be inclusive. Investing in inclusion will only make Cook County a better place to live and do business.

I have a story I want to share with this committee. As a wheelchair user I was glad to have the opportunity to speak recently before the full Board on the importance of ADA compliance given that last year was the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. I urged that the Board consider the ADA rehab proposal carefully. However, when I left, I had to wait over 30 minutes right outside these doors as staff searched for the key to the wheelchair lift. I say this to highlight that a truly barrier-free entrance to this room would have prevented me from being detained in going about my business, and prevented several staff here from having to scramble to get the key here, as it wouldn't have been necessary in the first place. This is just one small, if vivid, example of how access benefits everyone, not just people with disabilities.

We at Access Living urge that this committee vote to approve the proposed plan as it stands. Truly barrier-free access to all aspects of government is vital to helping the disability community, and the community at large, move closer to reaching our full potential and creating a city, county, and society that works for everyone. Thank you for your consideration.

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Established in 1980, Access Living is a change agent committed to fostering an inclusive society that enables Chicagoans with disabilities to live fully-engaged and self-directed lives. Nationally recognized as a leading force in the disability advocacy community, Access Living challenges stereotypes, protects civil rights and champions social reform. Their staff and volunteers combine knowledge and personal experience to deliver programs and services that equip people with disabilities to advocate for themselves. Access Living is at the forefront of the disability rights movement, removing barriers so people with disabilities can live the future they envision.

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