



## **Testimony of Access Living in Support of Cook County Assets Accessibility Improvements**

**November 16, 2022**

Good morning. Thank you to the members of the Asset Management Committee for allowing me to testify. My name is Amber Smock and I am the Director of Advocacy for Access Living. Access Living is a disability rights and services organization based in Chicago. Access Living challenges stereotypes, protects civil rights, and champions social reforms. Over the last 42 years, we have been committed to the Americans with Disabilities Act from its beginnings as a civil rights idea in the 1980s, to its passage by Congress in 1990, to its rulemaking and enforcement today.

On behalf of Access Living, I would like to express our thanks for the partnership and the commitment to accessibility demonstrated through the Bureau of Asset Management and the President's Office. It's not a simple matter to address accessibility with already existing assets that have many, many accessibility issues. That the County has been engaged in a multiyear process of upgrades is extremely important. We'd particularly like to thank the President's Chief of Staff Lanetta Haynes Turner and the Director of Equity and Inclusion, Denise Barreto, for helping to make the connections to create the partnership we have with the Bureau of Asset Management today.

We'd like to lift up some of the key accomplishments noted in the Annual Report on Accessibility in County Facilities, as follows:

- At the top of our list, we are very pleased to see that the County is giving much serious thought to the needed internal capacity to effectively manage the very large ADA related projects, by working to recruit an ADA Project Director. We know that securing someone who can help build internal capacity for this work has been a challenge, and making the role director-level should hopefully attract a qualified candidate with the appropriate expertise.
- We were also pleased to see that the vast majority of accessibility needed for the Department of Corrections Campus have been addressed, and that there is an RFP out to address the remaining upgrades. Access Living is also in conversation with the Sheriff's Office about their non-facility accessibility opportunities, so in an overall sense we are starting to see an increased overall focus on disability issues throughout County corrections.

- The work underway to improve the accessibility of Cook County courtrooms is a very significant endeavor that we hope will make the County justice system in fact more just, for all who work or are involved in court proceedings. We are particularly heartened by the opportunity presented by the work to issue an RFQ for upgrading the AV and IT capacity of Cook County's courtrooms. AV and IT are significant accessibility tools that only too often go overlooked.
- Last but not least, the multiyear project to renovate the Cook County Board room for full accessibility is a clear example of the County's willingness to lead by example. As we know, Commissioners, County staff, and the public will benefit from a welcoming space where democracy works for all of us.

Thank you to the Bureau of Asset management for your hard work on these projects, and we look forward to being in conversation in the years to come.

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