

HELEN ROSENTHAL

Council Member, District 6
Manhattan

DISTRICT OFFICE

563 COLUMBUS AVENUE, AT
87TH STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10024
(212) 873-0282

CITY HALL OFFICE

250 BROADWAY, ROOM 1744
NEW YORK, NY 10007
(212) 788-6975

www.council.nyc.gov



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CONTACT:

Stephanie Buhle: sbuhle@council.nyc.gov // (646) 647-4395

**COUNCIL MEMBERS ROSENTHAL AND TORRES ANNOUNCE
LEGISLATION TO PROVIDE EQUAL ACCESS TO PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITIES IN CIVIC LIFE AND CITY-SPONSORED CULTURAL EVENTS**

CITY HALL – Today Council Members Helen Rosenthal and Ritchie Torres introduced legislation that will promote equal access for people with disabilities attending events held or sponsored by the City and interacting with city agencies.

According to the Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities, **811,357 New Yorkers (10%) have disabilities.**

The legislative package, which includes three bills, will do the following:

- 1. Require that a qualified Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) coordinator be employed at every city agency.**
- 2. Require that all publicity materials for city-sponsored events include accessibility information.**
- 3. Require that all government meetings open to the public be held in a facility equipped with hearing loops by 2020.**

“Disability rights are civil rights, and for too long our City has looked the other way when it comes to accommodating people with disabilities. 10% of New Yorkers have a disability – be it a physical disability, hearing or visual impairment – and it is our responsibility to serve these New Yorkers as best we can. 25 years after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), New Yorkers with disabilities continue to

face barriers to full participation in civic life, at taxpayer-funded events, and in interactions with City agencies. Today’s legislation is a step towards equal access for all. I look forward to hearing input from advocates at the committee hearing on this legislation,” said **Council Member Helen Rosenthal, co-prime sponsor of the legislation.**

“Lack of accessibility to city resources is a dire issue for thousands of disabled New Yorkers that must be rectified. I’m proud to partner with Council Member Rosenthal on these important accessibility bills that will ensure individuals with disabilities have equal access to agency resources, city-sponsored events and government meetings,” said **Council Member Ritchie Torres, co-prime sponsor of the legislation.**

"For the past 25 years we have fought to make New York more accessible for people living with disabilities. That fight continues under this legislation, ensuring that people living with disabilities are able to attend city-sponsored events and are represented within city agencies. The City has been and continues to be a leader in enacting ADA related accommodations to provide equal access for all New Yorkers,” said **Council Member Andrew Cohen, Chair of the Committee on Mental Health, Developmental Disability, Alcoholism, Substance Abuse and Disability Services.**

BILL 1: Require that a qualified ADA coordinator be employed at every city agency.

This bill would require all city agencies to have an employee responsible for coordinating compliance with the ADA and investigating ADA complaints. The bill would also require the names and contact information for ADA coordinators of city agencies to be posted online.

“Right now it’s difficult for New Yorkers with disabilities to find a complete and current list of ADA coordinators at City agencies. Few agencies post their ADA coordinator’s name online, and it’s unclear if most agencies have an ADA coordinator at all. This lack of information is an unnecessary barrier that makes it harder for people with disabilities to access City services. This bill will expand this crucial position to all City agencies to ensure that they adequately address the needs of New Yorkers with disabilities,” said **Council Member Helen Rosenthal.**

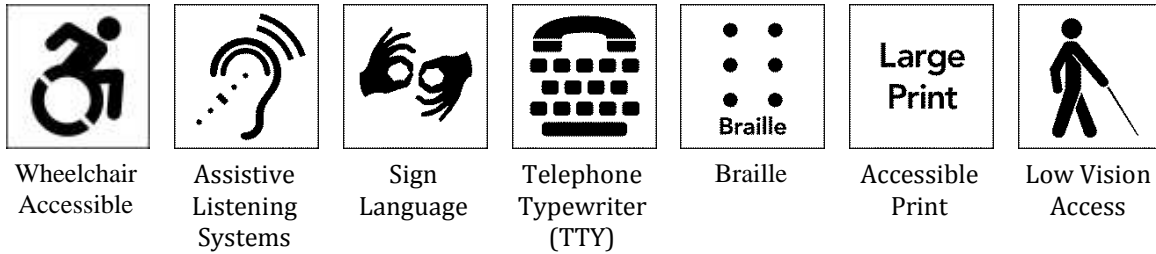
BILL 2: Require that all publicity materials for city-sponsored events include accessibility information.

Many public events do not currently publicize accessibility information-

The bill would require all publicity materials for city-sponsored events to include the following:

- Accessibility information
- A contact for obtaining additional information about accessibility

- A deadline by which accessibility requests should be received by said contact



The symbols, some of which are above, would provide accessibility information to the following communities:

- People with *physical disabilities*:
 - **Wheelchair Accessibility**
- People with a *hearing impairment*:
 - **Assistive Listening Systems**, including but not limited to hearing loops, for people with hearing loss
 - **Telephone Typewriter (TTY)**
 - **American Sign Language** interpretation (ASL)
 - **Communications access real-time translation (CART)**
- People with a *visual impairment*:
 - **Accessible Print**, size 18 or larger
 - **Low Vision Access**
 - **Braille**

“Every event funded by taxpayer money should make clear if it complies with federal law and accommodates people with disabilities. Far too often event organizers fail to include accessibility information. This legislation will open doors to the thousands of New Yorkers to ensure equality for all,” said **Council Member Helen Rosenthal**.

The bill would apply to publicity materials for all events with a capacity of 25 people or more, are open to the general public, and are hosted or sponsored by the City or an organization that received funding from the City of New York for the prior two years.

BILL 3: Require that all city government meetings that are open to be the public be held in a facility equipped with hearing loops by 2020.

According to the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, **16% of New York City adults age 18 and over experience hearing problems** (hearing impairment or ringing in the ears). One in ten New Yorkers age 18-44 experience hearing problems, and 22% of New Yorkers age 45 and over experience hearing problems.

People with a hearing impairment require hearing assistive technology to participate in their community. The Better Hearing Institute recommends **permanently installed hearing loops** as the most effective way to accommodate people with hearing loss in

public spaces. A permanently installed hearing loop is a wire placed around the perimeter of a room on the floor or ceiling; it improves sound quality to anyone wearing a hearing aid or cochlear implant with a telecoil by increasing the signal in proportion to background noise. The Hearing Loss Association of America describes hearing loops as “binoculars for the ears” for people with hearing loss.

Currently, some spaces for city government meetings comply with ADA requirements by offering infrared technology neckloops, which are loops that people with hearing loss must wear around their neck. This technology creates a social stigma for people with hearing loss and is not the most effective technology available to date.

This bill would require all city government meetings that are open to the public be held in a facility equipped with hearing loops by 2020. The bill would apply to public meetings held by any city agency, committee, commission, task force, community board, and the City Council. These organizations may apply for a waiver to the requirement, but they must prove impossibility or extreme hardship or provide a comparable alternative assistive listening system to qualify.

“Hearing loops are a game-changer for people with hearing loss,” said **Council Member Helen Rosenthal**. “Crowded rooms are especially difficult for people with hearing loss, and hearing loops offer much clearer sound than the best hearing aids on the market. Government meetings open to the public should be accessible to everyone.”

The bill would also require an annual report detailing agencies’ compliance with the bill.

“When it comes to hearing accessibility, current laws and regulations are woefully inadequate, chiefly because one size doesn’t fit all and most equipment is old, poorly installed, and/or poorly maintained. Individual hearing loss ranges from moderate to profound. What enables one person to hear and understand doesn’t work for all others. An estimated 1.6 New York City residents (and over 10 million visitors annually) have hearing loss. It is time that City policy provides these people with the access that others enjoy. One of every three senior citizens over age 65 has hearing loss, as does one of every two seniors over age 75. Seniors are less inclined to seek hearing healthcare and less likely to obtain and use hearing aids because of the widespread lack of hearing access in public places. As a result, many seniors withdraw from active socialization. Research now shows a link between untreated hearing loss and loss of cognitive ability,” said **Jerry Bergman, advocate for people with hearing loss**.

“People can become disabled at any point in their lifetime, but the frequency of disabilities increases with age – as does participation in public events for many. AARP believes it is essential that we provide the means for everyone to participate fully in all aspects of civic engagement. AARP is pleased that Councilwoman Rosenthal and the City Council are tackling this important issue, and we look forward to working with the Councilwoman on this legislative package,” said **Chris Widelo, Associate State Director, AARP New York**.

"While the Americans with Disabilities Act was legislated almost 25 years ago, achieving full accessibility is still an uphill battle for many, especially for people with hearing loss. The current administration of NYC has been working diligently to make improvements in making the city accessible for people with hearing loss and today's new legislation will have a great impact and benefit to many," said **Laurie Hanin, Executive Director of the Center for Hearing and Communication.**

"New York City's public meetings and events are important components of a vibrant and productive civic life. For people with disabilities, simple fixes through accommodations like the ones proposed by Council Member Rosenthal can promote equality and inclusion in civic affairs. Addressing the accommodation needs of people who are hard of hearing or for those who need materials in alternate formats is the right thing to do. We commend Councilmember Rosenthal for her initiative and join with her in urging the City Council to adopt this package of legislation," said **Monica Bartley, Community Outreach Organizer, Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY).**

"It's a tough fact that people with disabilities have challenges many of us cannot fathom. However, the tragedy is that the general public is often not even aware of those challenges. It is imperative that we pass this critical legislation - for without it, the issues which create a lack opportunity for progress, change, and equal access to what our city has to offer will never find their way to the table, let alone be addressed," said **Richard Ellenson, CEO of the Cerebral Palsy Foundation.**

"As the representative organization of 9,000 college students with disabilities, the CUNY Coalition for Students with Disabilities (CCSD) seeks to ensure equal access to University and community life through staunch advocacy and vigorous civic engagement. The legislative package introduced by Council Member Rosenthal will empower CUNY students with disabilities by ensuring that we can fully participate in all meetings and events held or sponsored by City government and agencies," said **Luis Gutierrez, Chair of the CUNY Coalition for Students with Disabilities.**

"Disability Rights Advocates commends Council Member Rosenthal for championing the civil rights of New Yorkers with disabilities and pressing the City to comply with its existing obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act," said **Christina Brandt-Young, Senior Staff Attorney at Disabilities Rights Advocates.**

"These bills are an admirable first step to making New York City more accessible. Accessible information on publicity material is important, but what really is needed is for events to be held in fully accessible facilities. At present, only a few City agencies have dedicated ADA coordinators; two examples are Parks and the Department of Transportation. It is important to have ADA coordinators whose primary responsibility is being a resource for people with disabilities," said **Edith Prentiss, VP of Legislative Affairs, Disabled In Action of Metro NY.**

"The Harlem Independent Living Center applauds Council Member Helen Rosenthal for the introduction of her accessibility legislation. It is not only the right thing to do in requiring all publicity materials for city-sponsored events include accessibility

information; it makes financial sense as well...why hire an ASL interpreter but not bother to let the community who requires this service know it will be available for them?! This is a great step towards inclusion in every sense of the word," said **Christina Curry, Executive Director of the Harlem Independent Living Center.**

"The Hearing Loss Association of America and the New York City Chapter of HLAA are thrilled that Council Member Helen Rosenthal has introduced these three bills, which would give equal access to public meetings to those with hearing loss. For too long, people with hearing loss have been essentially left outside the meeting room doors, because they were unable to hear the proceedings. Even when announcements were made that hearing accommodations would be provided, we were often left to guess whether they would be in place, or working when we got there. It's long past time an ADA coordinator position was established to help all people with disabilities get the access they need in NYC. Taken together, these three bills go a long way toward ensuring equal access for people with hearing loss. Twenty-five years after the signing of the ADA people with hearing loss have still not been able to become full partners in City government. Passage of these bills will rectify that inequality. We applaud Council Member Rosenthal, and thank her for her leadership in promoting equal access for people with hearing loss," said **Katherine Bouton, President of the Hearing Loss Association of America's New York City chapter and a member of the board of Hearing Loss Association of America.**

"JASA strongly supports the proposed legislation to better accommodate New Yorkers with disabilities," said **JASA CEO Kathryn Haslanger.** "Our mission is to enrich and sustain the lives of New York's aging population, many of whom stay actively involved in public affairs and frequently attend City events. Council Member Rosenthal's proposal helps all seniors stay engaged in their community and equips them with an equal opportunity to have their voices heard."

"Twenty-five years ago, this country took a major step in recognizing the rights of the disabled by passing the Americans with Disabilities Act. Lexington School and Center for the Deaf applauds Council Member Rosenthal's proposed legislation to provide equal access to municipal services for New York City's residents with disabilities. Her legislation will provide Deaf and hard-of-hearing New Yorkers with the ability to participate even more fully in civic and community life," said **Donald Galloway, CEO/Superintendent, Lexington School for the Deaf and Lexington Center for the Deaf, East Elmhurst, Queens.**

"The comprehensive legislative package that Council Member Rosenthal is introducing is a common sense approach that will not only ensure New York City complies with ADA regulations, but sets the standard for all city and state governments. I commend and thank her for her leadership and commitment to people with disabilities," said **Alan R. Morse, JD, PhD, President & CEO, Lighthouse Guild.**

"The National Multiple Sclerosis Society New York City-Southern New York Chapter supports all legislation, policies and regulations that will improve accessibility in New York City. It is important that everyone who resides in or visits our city be able to access

all that it has to offer," said **Gene Veigl, Director of Advocacy Services for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, New York City – Southern New York Chapter.**

"Council Member Rosenthal's legislation highlights that more work needs to be done to make New York City truly accessible for all people with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act is 25 years old but the hoped for results have not been fully achieved. Only one third of people that are blind that want to work are employed. Less than 10% of people that experience vision loss ever receive vision rehabilitation services. By naming an ADA coordinator at each city agency, the proposed legislation spotlights where the public can seek help to access city services," said **VISIONS Executive Director/CEO Nancy D. Miller.**

"People with disabilities have been left out of the conversation too often when it comes to government policy making. This bill is a step in the right direction to having people with disabilities represented, not only at public forums relating to government affairs, but literally to have someone with disability issues in mind working alongside those in the government who are making the decisions that impact our community. For these reasons and many others, we strongly support this legislation," said **Alex Elegudin, President of Wheeling Forward.**

"In reflecting upon the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act, there has been tremendous progress in accessibility to housing and employment," said **Matt Sturiale, CEO of YAI, a network of agencies serving individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in New York City and throughout the metropolitan area.** "It is encouraging to see our government leaders advocating to ensure even greater accessibility in government services, transportation and communication. We applaud City Council Member Rosenthal for her inclusive approach to basic civil rights for all."

"For years people with disabilities have been kept away from the "round-table" we were left in a position where we were not able to be a part of the conversation...the tides are now changing--with the introduction of this new legislation people living with disabilities will now be able to help shape the future of our great City of New York," said **George Gallego, Founder & CEO of Wheels of Progress.**

"For the last 33 years, Hands On has provided and promoted access for Deaf and hard of hearing audiences in NYC's rich cultural arts community. As the cultural capital of the world, we support and applaud Council Member Helen Rosenthal's efforts to promote access and inclusion for all people with disabilities to participate in our wonderful arts and cultural scene," said **Beth Prevor, Executive Director of Hands On.**

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