



Odette Ramos

Baltimore City Councilwoman

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100 N. Holliday Street, Room 553

Baltimore MD 21202

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Testimony

**25-0126 Accessibility in City Programs, Services, and Activities
SUPPORT with SPONSOR AMENDMENTS**

Dear Chair Porter and Members of the Public Health and Environment Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present 25-0126 Accessibility in City Programs, Services, and Activities. I am humbly asking for your support with Sponsor amendments.

This bill came about after the successful passage of our Language Access legislation two years ago. That legislation requires each City agency to work with Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MIMA) to create language access plans to ensure that every resident, no matter what language is spoken, can access the city services they deserve.

It became clear that a similar need existed for residents with disabilities. While Baltimore City complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a more thoughtful and strategic approach was needed. Modeling the implementation of the ADA after the Language Access bill related to agency plans made sense to assist with coordination and implementation. Moreover, advocates were concerned that federal protections might be removed by this federal administration, and so strong language was needed to ensure that in Baltimore City, all residents have access to services they deserve.

We worked for a year on this bill with advocates, the Office of Equity and Civil Rights, and the Law Department to get this right. With the Sponsor amendments, the bill does several things:

- Codifies the Americans with Disabilities Act into our laws with clear definitions of "reasonable accommodation" and "reasonable modifications"
- States clearly that City government agencies cannot discriminate based on disabilities
- Ensures that upon request, accommodation will be made for residents with disabilities to participate in public meetings, and outlines what accommodation might be.
- Creates a grievance procedure if a resident is not granted accommodation or that discrimination occurred.
- Asserts that every City agency will create their Accessibility Plan and outlines which requirements for those plans.
- Explains that each City agency will appoint an ADA coordinator who works to implement the Accessibility Plan with the assistance of the Office of Equity and Civil Rights.
- Outlines the Digital Access Plan requirements for all digital communications on websites, social media, virtual meetings, and the like.

The Digital Access plan section of the bill must be codified by April 25th. This timing was recently made known to me, and so I apologize for the rush in requesting a vote today on this bill so that we can double read at our next meeting.

I'm very proud of the work everyone has done on this bill. More importantly, I'm proud of our City Council and Mayor for codifying our values. Everyone, regardless of who you are, your ability, your language, your immigration status, or background deserves access to our City services and we will make significant investments and efforts to make sure we provide outstanding service to everyone.

I humbly request your support with Sponsor amendments.

Respectfully Submitted:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Odette Ramos".

Odette Ramos
Baltimore City Councilwoman, District 14