

CALIFORNIA COMMISSION ON DISABILITY ACCESS EDUCATION AND OUTREACH COMMITTEE

Teleconference Meeting Minutes
August 25, 2021

1. Call to Order

Chair Souraya Sue ElHessen welcomed everyone and called the meeting of the Education and Outreach (E&O) Committee of the California Commission on Disability Access (CCDA) to order at 1:32 p.m. Due to the ongoing health emergency, and consistent with Executive Order N-29-20, this meeting was conducted entirely by Zoom and teleconference.

Staff Member Saenz reviewed the meeting protocols.

Roll Call

Staff Member Saenz called the roll and confirmed the presence of a quorum.

Commissioners Present:

Souraya Sue ElHessen, Chair
Michael Paravagna
Ashley Leon-Vazquez

Committee Members Present:

Stephen David Simon
Zeenat Hassan

Other Commissioners Present:

Jacqueline Jackson
Brian Jones, Senator, represented by
Brixton Layne

Committee Members Absent:

Arnie Lerner

Staff Present:

Angela Jemmott, Executive Director
Kamran Qazi, Legal Counsel
Adam Barsanti, Associate Governmental
Program Analyst
Theresa Brown, Data and Research Analyst
Stephanie Groce, Disability Access
Technician
Phil McPhaul, Operations Manager
Davina Saenz, Marketing and Outreach
Analyst

Also Present:

Maria Arias
Samuel Arias
Marianne Grosner
Debra Kamm
Bri Kay
Rita Loof

2. Approval of Meeting Minutes (May 19, 2021) – Action

**California Commission on Disability Access
Education and Outreach Committee
August 25, 2021, Teleconference Meeting Minutes**

MOTION: Commissioner Paravagna moved to approve the May 19, 2021, California Commission on Disability Access Education and Outreach Committee Meeting Minutes as presented. Committee Member Simon seconded. Motion carried unanimously with no abstentions.

3. Comments from the Public on Issues Not on this Agenda

Rita Loof, parent of students with disabilities, stated children are being denied access to education, which will result in them not having equal access to jobs and society in general. The special education system has been hijacked by for-profit law firms representing school districts who are acting as a barrier for children to get an appropriate education. The speaker shared their experience with a law firm that engages in hard-ball tactics against families with children with disabilities. The speaker asked this Committee to look into these issues and determine how to partner together to remove the barrier of litigation and to ensure access to education.

Debra Kamm, parent of students with disabilities, special education consultant, and advocate, stated they founded and run a nonprofit organization for families that have children with congenital heart issues. The speaker agreed with the previous speaker that there is discrimination and retaliation against families that have children with disabilities. The speaker offered to work with the Committee on these issues. There are misconceptions about disabilities. Also, most individuals think only of physical impairments and not hidden disabilities. It is important not to limit access to wheelchair ramps and parking.

Chair ElHessen stated she is an active member of the school board and is aware of these concerns. She shared her email address and offered to speak offline with members of the public about these issues.

Marianne Grosner, parent of students with disabilities, stated remote access is important in helping parents who have children with disabilities have their voices heard at these meetings. The speaker spoke against the schools going back to in-person-only meetings and refusing Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) access requests. The speaker shared obstacles faced by members of the public in their school district.

Bri Kay echoed the comments of the previous speakers and asked this Committee to ensure that there is equal opportunity access to board meetings across the state. The speaker stated the need to continue virtual options to meetings.

Samuel Arias, a 6th-grade student with special needs, asked the Committee to ensure that school board meetings allow public participation by telephone, Zoom, and Teams. The speaker stated their school district denied them providing public comment since their family includes individuals with high risk and has avoided in-person meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic. Children need access to education. The speaker asked for more education and less litigation.

**California Commission on Disability Access
Education and Outreach Committee
August 25, 2021, Teleconference Meeting Minutes**

Samuel Arias stated the need to ensure that board members are informed when answering litigation. The speaker stated they were sued in April of 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic and their school board members for not informed. The speaker encouraged following the YouTube movement Every Student Successful/More Education, Less Litigation/Special Education Children Matter movement.

Maria Arias, Co-Founder of the YouTube movement Every Student Successful/More Education, Less Litigation/Special Education Children Matter, and a parent of children with special needs, stated their school district closed all parent participation in 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Just last month, the school district began allowing public comment via email but emails are not acknowledged during meetings. The speaker asked the Committee to request that Board meetings allow public participation by telephone.

Maria Arias stated the need for special education children to have access to education. The speaker also stated the need for board members to hear when the school district enters into litigation and for litigation to be approved by the school board. Board members are currently not involved in that process.

Commissioner Paravagna stated public school districts are Title II entities and have responsibilities within the ADA. He suggested asking for evidence that the required responsibilities have been met. He suggested contacting the US Department of Education Civil Rights office, which is under the US Department of Justice – the primary enforcement agency.

Commissioner Paravagna stated school districts are held to comply with the Brown Act for their open meetings. He stated the need to incorporate learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic to make meetings more accessible.

4. Developing Partnerships and Outreach – Update and Discussion

a. Chico Chamber of Commerce

Executive Director Jemmott stated the Chico Chamber of Commerce has expressed interest in partnering with the CCDA and have linked the CCDA website to theirs. Their platform reaches out to over 3,000 businesses.

b. California Governor's Office of Economic Development (GO-Biz)

Executive Director Jemmott stated GO-Biz has expressed interest in partnering with the CCDA and has featured CCDA tools on their online portal.

c. Department of General Services (DGS), Division of the State Architect (DSA)

Executive Director Jemmott stated the DSA Office of Communication is developing an on-demand tool for the education of Certified Access Specialists (CASPs) and are looking to the CCDA to be a part of this on-demand product. State Architect and CCDA

**California Commission on Disability Access
Education and Outreach Committee
August 25, 2021, Teleconference Meeting Minutes**

Commissioner Ida Clair has offered the DSA CASp 101 training to Commissioners and staff. This will soon be included as part of the orientation process for new Commissioners.

d. California Lawyers Association

Executive Director Jemmott stated the California Lawyers Association has asked staff to be a part of a panel for their virtual annual meeting in September.

e. CCDA One-Page Informational to the Legislature

Executive Director Jemmott reviewed the CCDA One-Page Information Sheet to the Legislature, which was created by the Legislative Committee and included in the meeting materials. She asked for Committee Member feedback on how best to present and market it.

Questions and Discussion

Chair ElHessen suggested emailing the one-page information sheet to all legislative offices and directors. She suggested doing talking head avatars demonstrating shared ideas focusing on different disabilities to communicate the different needs.

Committee Member Simon agreed with broad distribution to state representatives and departments and suggested also distributing it to local government and federal representatives. He stated the need to include clear links. He offered to put it out on his office's list of contacts and social media.

Committee Member Hassan suggested defining that the term "stakeholder" as part of the document and that it includes members of the business and disabilities communities. She suggested changing "alleged" to "potential" since the phrase "providing recommendations on alleged ADA violations" sounds like Commissioners will weigh in on active cases. She stated she will send her comments to Commissioner Paravagna in an email.

Committee Member Hassan suggested distributing the document to grass roots organizations and translating it into multiple languages.

Executive Director Jemmott stated the one-page information sheet was created for members of the Legislature. There are other plans to market to businesses and grass roots organizations in the future.

Committee Member Simon spoke in support of creating a document in multiple translations for grass roots and other organizations.

Action Items

- No action items.

5. CCDA Public Service Announcement and Informational – Update and Discussion

**California Commission on Disability Access
Education and Outreach Committee
August 25, 2021, Teleconference Meeting Minutes**

a. Opportunity for Radio Segment

Staff Member Saenz stated staff has researched opportunities for placements of various radio stations and secured free outreach on local radio stations 103.9FM, 105.5FM, 105.7FM, 710AM, and 1380AM, which are broadcasted by Salem Media. Salem Media has offered to give the Commission copies of the recorded messages.

Executive Director Jemmott asked Commissioner Paravagna to do a radio interview on October 4th about the history and current campaigns of the CCDA.

Staff Member Saenz stated Salem Media has offered a radio PSA opportunity to the CCDA for free. She reviewed the CCDA Public Service Announcement and Informational document, which was included in the meeting materials.

Executive Director Jemmott asked Chair ElHessen to narrate the PSA. She asked for feedback on the draft PSA announcement.

Questions and Discussion

Chair ElHessen suggested emphasizing that parking violations have increased post-COVID.

Commissioner Paravagna suggested "parking has always been a major barrier for people with disabilities. With the COVID-19 pandemic, this has worsened."

Action Items

- Commissioner Paravagna is to do a radio interview on October 4th.
- Chair ElHessen is to narrate the PSA.

6. Committee Membership – Update and Discussion

a. Recommendations from Committee

Executive Director Jemmott stated business associations, city chambers, and business liaisons have expressed interest in partnering with the CCDA but not necessarily as members of the Committee. She stated they may be invited to participate in special focus meetings to get their feedback on tools and events.

Questions and Discussion

Chair ElHessen suggested contacting grass roots organizations that reach out to businesses and culturally diverse, disability, and senior groups to invite them to be members of the Committee.

Committee Member Hassan offered to work with staff to develop a resource list to work with organizations from the bottom up.

**California Commission on Disability Access
Education and Outreach Committee
August 25, 2021, Teleconference Meeting Minutes**

Commissioner Paravagna suggested putting together a number of different products to showcase and presentations to describe the work of the Commission and to host a virtual open house.

Chair ElHessen encouraged Committee Members to reach out to their cities and chambers.

Action Items

- No action items.

7. Continuation of CCDA Outreach Projects – Update and Discussion

a. Open-air Dining and Curbside Pickup Disability Access Considerations

Executive Director Jemmott stated the Open-air Dining and Curbside Pickup Disability Access Considerations document has been published in the summer edition of the California Economic Development Journal. Also, staff has drafted a letter, which is linked to the website in multiple languages, to be sent to cities in California.

Committee Member Simon suggested already having this document prepared in Spanish. He stated the city of San Francisco will soon put out explicit regulations, which align with many items in the Open-air Dining document. He stated the need to compare the San Francisco regulations to the Open-air Dining document once the regulations are published. Also, Los Angeles is working on regulations for permanent al fresco dining.

Executive Director Jemmott stated the English version of the Open-air Dining document will be sent to cities. It has already been translated into Spanish and Chinese and will be made available on the website.

Chair ElHessen suggested sending the document to community-based organizations that deal with many businesses such as the Lions and Kiwanis Clubs.

Committee Member Hassan stated the link at the end of page 2 is currently broken and should be reconnected.

b. Disability Access and Education Revolving Fund

Chair ElHessen stated the importance of getting this information out to cities on how the fund can be used effectively to support them.

Executive Director Jemmott stated staff is continuing to work on this tool and will report on the progress at a future meeting.

Action Items

- Staff is to reconnect the link at the end of page 2 of the Open-air Dining document.

**California Commission on Disability Access
Education and Outreach Committee
August 25, 2021, Teleconference Meeting Minutes**

8. Future Agenda Items

No future agenda items were offered.

9. Adjourn

Chair ElHessen stated the next E&O Committee meeting is scheduled for October 27th. She adjourned the meeting at approximately 3:00 p.m.