

CALIFORNIA COMMISSION ON DISABILITY ACCESS WINTER SCOOP NEWSLETTER

IN MEMORY OF COMMISSIONER BETTY WILSON

Former CCDA Commissioner Betty Wilson was a passionate advocate for civil rights, program access, and cultural diversity. She established the inaugural Department on Disability for a municipal government, influencing federal, state, and local civil rights laws, particularly those related to disability issues. Commissioner Wilson represented the City of Los Angeles at international conferences, where she advised on legislative policy positions related to disability laws.

Commissioner Wilson was a member of the CCDA from (enter dates served) and served as chair the Chair Education and Outreach Committee. Commissioner Wilson advocated for disability access to involve people with disabilities as contributors to ensure a more equitable society for everyone. The impact of Commissioner Wilson's advocacy and leadership will be remembered and cherished by all those whose lives she touched. Her legacy will continue to inspire future generations in the ongoing pursuit of a more inclusive society for all.

UPCOMING COMMISSION EVENTS

Executive Committee March 06, 2024 | 1:30 – 3:00 P.M.

Full Commission March 20, 2024 | 10:00 A.M. – 4:00 P.M.

Education and Outreach Committee April 3, 2024 | 1:30 - 3:00 P.M.

Legislative Committee April 24, 2024 | 1:30 P.M. – 3:00 P.M.

WORLD BRAILLE DAY CELEBRATED

This January, we celebrated World Braille Day in honor of Louis Braille, the inventor of the modern-day Braille system. Born in 1809 and losing his sight at a young age, Louis Braille developed a writing system that created a new way of communication for the blind and visually impaired. The Braille system is a tactile writing system that uses a series of raised dots arranged in a specific pattern. Each combination of dots represents a letter, number, punctuation mark, or even musical notation.

Over the years, technology has enhanced Braille accessibility with the development of electronic Braille displays and devices. These advancements combine traditional Braille with modern technology, facilitating education, employment, and communication. World Braille Day is celebrated January 4th, Mr. Braille's birthday, and highlights advancements in Braille accessibility. Additionally, it is a reminder of how the Braille System promotes literacy, independence, and equal access to information for individuals with visual disabilities.

CALIFORNIA SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CENTER (SBDC) – NOTEWORTHY ALLIANCES

The California Small Business Development Center (SBDC) serves as a resource for small businesses across the state, offering low to no-cost services that provide advising, training, and capital assistance to businesses in their local communities. California SBDC focuses on economic growth, job creation, and small business success by providing consulting services, workshops, and trainings. The regional presence across California provides help to small businesses, focusing in certain areas and providing the right resources. With 56 California SBDC centers strategically located across the state, the organization ensures accessibility both online and in-person. These centers collaborate with universities, colleges, and government entities to enhance their services and to be able to assist with various industries. The California SBDC creates accessible opportunities for small businesses in the state, offering low to no-cost services, professional expertise, and strategic accessibility to successfully overcome challenges.

NVACCESS – ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

NVAccess is a non-profit organization that develops and maintains NVDA (Nonvisual Desktop Access), an open-source screen reader for users with visual impairments. The organization provides free accessibility solutions, promoting inclusivity and equal access to digital information for all. This open-source screen reader was created for users with visual impairments; additionally, it can be used to help identify website accessibility issues. NVDA accessibility testing creates access for businesses to assess their websites for screen reading accessibility, it can contribute to a more accessible and equitable online experience. NVDA accessibility testing contributes to the development of an accessible website, promoting inclusivity. NVAccess envisions a digital landscape where all users, regardless of visual abilities, can navigate and engage with online content.

COMMISSIONER DR. SUE ELHESSEN

Commissioner Dr. Sue ElHessen is a dedicated advocate for disability rights and serves as the Chair of the CCDA Education and Outreach Committee. Living with Post-Polio, her personal experiences have shaped her commitment to equitable treatment for individuals with disabilities. Her advocacy is rooted in real-life situations such as identifying ADA issues when traveling for conferences or vacations. Commissioner Dr. ElHessen emphasizes right to accessibility without constant justification. She outlines her goals for advancing accessibility within the CCDA's jurisdiction in her local community of Bellflower. This includes supporting small businesses by showcasing available grant resources. Engaging with cities is a crucial step, collaborating with local governments to promote accessibility initiatives.

Commissioner Dr. ElHessen is actively working with the Bellflower City Manager to develop emergency evacuation plans tailored for individuals with disabilities. This includes collaboration with the local fire department through Community Emergency Response Training (CERT) to enhance emergency preparedness. Additionally, she is in the process of working to create a Disability Advisory Committee for the Bellflower community on access and inclusion to city events and services. Commissioner Dr. ElHessen's advocacy reflects a genuine commitment to creating an inclusive and equitable society for individuals with disabilities. Through her work with the CCDA, she continues to educate about accessibility, contributing to a more inclusive future for all.

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY - FIRST DISABILITY CULTURAL CENTER

California State University, Sacramento (CSUS) has taken a significant step towards inclusivity with the establishment of the Disability Cultural Center, the first of its kind in the California State University (CSU) system. This center is dedicated to creating a welcoming environment for students with disabilities, recognizing and addressing their challenges in academic pursuits. CSUS is creating an inclusive environment that goes beyond physical spaces, incorporating assistive technologies, social activities, and specialized resources to support the diverse needs of its student community.

The Disability Cultural Center Social Space serves as a safe space for disabled students and allies, offering board games, including Braille versions. The center hosts classes and is the primary location for the Disabled and Non-Disabled Alliance (DANA) social club. The Sensory Room provides a calming environment with adjustable lighting, soothing colors, and sensory tools to support neurodivergent individuals in promoting well-being and relaxation. The Assistive Technology Lab offers a variety of assistive technology tools, including text-to-speech/speech-to-text software, screen readers, and speech recognition software. The lab also provides training and workshops on accessible technologies for educational materials. With the start of the Disability Cultural

Center, CSUS is an example for inclusivity in higher education, combining resources, social activities, and assistive technologies to ensure an enriching experience for students with disabilities.

CCDA SCOOP RESOURCES

- [California Small Business Development Center \(SBDC\)](#)
- [NVAccess - Nonvisual Desktop Access \(NVDA\)](#)
- [California State University](#)

CCDA CONTACT INFORMATION

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