

COMMITTEE ON DISABILITIES

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON DISABILITIES

***VOTE**

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Thursday, April 30, 2026

Start: 10:15 A.M.

Recess: 10:25 A.M.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - 8th Floor
Hearing Room 1

B E F O R E: Hon. Shahana K. Hanif, Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Jumaane Williams, Public Advocate

Tiffany L. Cabán

Carmen N. De La Rosa

Rita C. Joseph

Sandy Nurse

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SERGEANT KING: Good morning. This is a mic check for the Committee on Disabilities. Today's date is April 30th, 2026. We are located in Hearing Room 1, and this is being recorded by Tavel King.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the New York City Council vote for the Committee on Disabilities.

At this time, I'd like to remind everyone to please silence all cell phones, and at no point during the vote may you approach the dais.

Chair, we are ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: [GAVEL] Good morning and welcome, everyone. I'm Council Member Shahana Hanif, chair of the Committee on Disabilities.

First, I'd like to acknowledge my colleagues who are present: Council Member Nurse, Council Member De La Rosa, and Council Member Cabán on Zoom. Thank you for being here today.

The Committee is voting on Resolution Number 396, sponsored by the Public Advocate, Jumaane Williams. This resolution would declare May 15th through June 15th as Tourette Syndrome Awareness Month and June 7th as Tourette Syndrome Awareness Day in the City of New York.

Tourette Syndrome is a neurological disorder characterized by involuntary, repetitive movements and vocalizations known as tics, affecting an estimated one in 162 children in the United States.

Despite its prevalence, Tourette Syndrome remains widely misunderstood. Misconceptions fuel stigma and, in some instances, unlawful discrimination in employment and public life.

By declaring May 15th through June 15th as Tourette Syndrome Awareness Month and June 7th as Tourette Syndrome Awareness Day, the Council affirms New York City's commitment to disability inclusion and ensures that the nearly one million New Yorkers living with a disability can count on their city to promote accurate information and protect their civil rights.

Public Advocate, would you like to make a statement?

PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: I thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you for the work you do in this committee.

First, I do want to acknowledge Emma O'Connell and Jason Kaplan from the Tourette Syndrome

1 Association of America. Thank you for being here. And
2 when there's a bunch of people with Tourette's in the
3 room, it can get interesting. So I just want to make
4 sure that folks are aware.

5 But, as I mentioned, my name is Jumaane
6 Williams, Public Advocate of the City of New York.
7 Again, I want to thank Chair Hanif and the Members of
8 the Committee on Disability for holding this vote.

9 The CDC estimates that about 1.4 million
10 people in the U.S. have Tourette's Syndrome or a
11 persistent tic disorder. I am one of those people,
12 and I'm believed to be the first in the country to be
13 elected to public office when I was elected 16 years
14 ago.

15 People with Tourette's Syndrome
16 experience tics, involuntary, sudden, brief
17 intermittent repetitive movements or noises. It can
18 significantly impact a person's day-to-day or even
19 minute-to-minute life and either be temporary or
20 something a person lives with for the rest of their
21 life.

People with Tourette Syndrome are also
more likely to have other comorbid disabilities such

as learning disabilities, autism, and depression. I myself have also been diagnosed with ADHD.

While Tourette Syndrome itself can make day-to-day life difficult, so too does a lack of awareness about it. Many people have never heard of Tourette's or have heard misinformation and may react negatively, even violently, to a person's tics. I myself lived with Tourette's for a time not knowing what it was, and in fact first learned about Tourette's from a 20/20 special, not from a doctor.

Tourette's is too often viewed as a moral failing, as if a person is refusing to stop a tic, rather than being unable to, especially so when a tic is obscene language or a slur called "Coprolalia," something I've struggled with.

Stigma and discrimination can make getting and keeping a job more difficult or lead to increased contact with the criminal legal system.

Many people with Tourette's retreat from public life, isolating themselves from other people due to shame or fear, and may avoid seeking treatment.

Recently at the BAFTA Awards, where John Davidson, an activist who educates people about

Tourette's Syndrome, shouted the N-word as two Black actors were presenting awards, setting off a firestorm of media attention and outrage.

Tics that include offensive language and slurs can cause real hurt and pain, even if the person saying it not only does not intend harm but is deeply regretful and embarrassed about it.

As a Black man myself who actually also tics the N-word, I know no matter the reason, the word has power and does real damage, and we can't minimize it. I think we can recognize that even involuntary impact devoid of intent can't be ignored.

Too often the burden of empathy is placed primarily on the Black community. At the same time, and given the importance of this resolution, we have to also make space for compassion and grace for the person with Tourette's and take this opportunity to educate people about the disability.

What happened at BAFTA should not have happened, but it did. So let's learn from it. At that moment, BAFTA had a responsibility to prepare their attendees for the possibility that they may hear this language directed at them. Now we have an opportunity

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2 to inform people more broadly. They also could have
3 edited out certain parts of the broadcast.

4 Education and awareness have proven to be
5 effective in combating stigma against disabilities
6 and other disorders. Today we are hearing a
7 resolution I introduced declaring May 15th through
8 June 15th as Tourette Syndrome Awareness Month, and
9 June 7th as Tourette Syndrome Awareness Day in New
10 York City.

11 Knowing a person with a disability
12 reduces stigma, underscoring the need for raising
13 awareness, representation, and an open dialogue about
14 Tourette's and other tic disorders. I hope that young
15 people living with tic disorders can see their own
16 potential in me. And I hope everyone will join me in
17 celebrating this newly recognized month and day.

18 I was the first elected official in the
19 country known to have Tourette Syndrome. I'm proud to
20 say I'm no longer the only one. I want to shout out
21 Justin Farmer in Connecticut, who ran for office
because he saw me. I want young people like me out
there to know that your condition is a part of you,
but you're not defined by it, and it doesn't have to
limit what you do; it only changes how you do it.

More broadly, recognizing Tourette Syndrome Association Month, I hope we can reach others with the message.

I'd like to thank my staff: Gwen Saffran, Senior Policy and Legislative Associate; Veronica Aveis, Chief Deputy Public Advocate for Policy; Rosie Mendez, Director of Policy and Legislation; Elizabeth Kennedy, Deputy Public Advocate for Education Opportunity; and Lupe Hernandez, Community Organizer; and the Tourette Syndrome Association of America, for their work on this resolution.

I'd also like to shout out a young man named Cameron Jackson, whose grandmother is in the audience, who approached me at an event. I am proud to have had him tour City Hall and my office.

I'm trying to lean into this even more. It's not something I ever hid, but as I'm approaching 50, I am realizing the impact of the coexistence of being Black and having Tourette's, and how it affects a lot of folks and a lot of young people. So I'm doing my best to try to lean into it even more and be who you needed when you were younger.

So I appreciate you taking the time to pass this resolution—and I did not intend to get this

emotional as I read this. But I just want to say thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you, Public Advocate, for your vulnerability and for leading the way for so many of us who have disabilities and have felt discouraged from being in leadership positions to run for office. We see you, and we appreciate you, and we're so, so incredibly lucky to have a leader in this city who understands that disability justice has to be in the fold of everything that we do in this city. So thank you.

I would like to thank my own staff and the Disabilities Committee staff, Senior Legislative Counsel Sara Sucher and Senior Policy Analyst Chloë Rivera.

I will now turn to the Clerk to call the roll.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Thank you. Good morning. William Martin, Committee Clerk, roll call vote Committee on Disabilities on Resolution 396.

Chair Hanif?

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: An enthusiastic aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Council Member Cabán?

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Aye.

COMMITTEE ON DISABILITIES

11

COMMITTEE CLERK: Thank you. Council
Member De La Rosa?

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Aye. And thank
you, Public Advocate, for leading the way as usual.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Council Member Joseph?

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: (ABSENT)

COMMITTEE CLERK: Council Member Nurse?

COUNCIL MEMBER NURSE: I vote aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK: With a vote of 4 in the
affirmative, 0 in the negative, and no abstentions,
the resolution has been approved by the Council--by
the Committee. Excuse me.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: [GAVEL]

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is no interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date August 13, 2026