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FOR THE RECORD

Mental Health, Mental Retardation, Alcoholism, Drug Abuse & Disability Services Committee Hearing

Intro 0797-A: Requiring a sign at inaccessible building entrances, public toilets, and elevators giving directions to the nearest available accessible entrance or facility for persons with disabilities.

September 24th, 2012

My name is Jean Ryan and I am Vice President for Public Affairs of Disabled In Action. I am unable to attend today's hearing because of prior commitments, but I appreciate the chance for our organization to testify and I look forward to more legislation promoting access such as making all taxis and liveries accessible to people in wheelchairs. As the necessity for this current bill shows, separate is not equal.

The bill is good as far as it goes, although we are very concerned about enforcement by the Department of Buildings. How will businesses, especially small businesses, know about the law? When a DOB inspector goes into the building for another reason, will s/he check to see if this law is complied with? If we complain to 311, will DOB do anything about it and how long will it take? Will 311 call takers be trained to take information about this?

I hope that in the future, the Council will consider applying this law to internal establishments which are inside a bigger building, too, such as Chelsea Market, Grand Central Station, and the Limelight. We need more access.

Locked accessible doors are a concern. Many businesses say it is a security issue, but if revolving doors are open to everyone who can go through them, why shouldn't nearby push doors also be open to everyone who can go through them? Requiring accessible doors to be unlocked would open many doors to us and make businesses think more about access. A locked accessible door is really saying, "KEEP OUT."

What is also needed is for businesses to have a sign at their inaccessible entrances saying they have a portable ramp if they do, and a bell system with a phone number to call when a person needs the ramp. Otherwise we will not know if an establishment has a ramp or be able to get someone's attention inside to bring it out.

Lastly, in regard to entrances, some restaurants have canvas entryways on the sidewalk which block wheelchair access to their otherwise accessible entrances. Something needs to be done about them. They are hardly ever accessible.

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