

Item d(2) Disability Services and Community Engagement Work Plan Annual Report

Michele Mashburn

Sun 5/19/2024 9:39 PM

To: District3 <district3@sanjoseca.gov>; CEDCommittee <CEDCommittee@sanjoseca.gov>

Cc: Mohsen, Raania <Raania.Mohsen@sanjoseca.gov>; Maciel, Zulma <zulma.maciel@sanjoseca.gov>

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Dear City of San José Community Economic Development Committee Members:

My name is Michele Mashburn, and I am a resident of District 3 in San José. I am also a disability advocate, activist, and trainer using a human rights framework to advance disability equity. I am writing to express my support and appreciation for the work of the Disability Affairs Officer over the last year. It is also important to recognize that a lot more work is needed to prevent the continued marginalization of individuals with disabilities.

Since the passage of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, disability has become a compliance issue rather than a fundamental human rights concern. Despite these civil rights laws, individuals with disabilities continue to face systemic barriers, relegating them to second-class citizenship with limited opportunities.

I am grateful that the Disability Affairs Officer has stayed true to the grounding written into the Disability Inclusion Equity Pledge. Her job has not been easy and while San José has been receptive to these changes, it has also been resistant to moving beyond compliance. The City wants to believe compliance solves the structural and institutional ableism that stigmatizes and marginalizes disabled people. And yet, this compliance mindset still failed to recognize when the variable of disability was not included in the definition of racial and social equity?

City leadership and attorneys approved this omission, thereby perpetuating institutional ableism, discrimination at the systems level. It is imperative to rectify this oversight and ensure equity initiatives are truly inclusive so that race and social equity can be achieved. I hope that this oversight is addressed at the policy level in order to unwrite this piece of structural oppression.

Elected officials' discomfort shows by their resistance to the words disabled and disability. Resorting to euphemisms shows a misguided idea that disability must be softened, implying a devaluation of people with disabilities. Words matter and inappropriate terms can make people feel excluded or offended and can block full and meaningful participation. Euphemisms can be seen as discriminatory and block enjoyment of human rights. (See the [United Nations' Disability-Inclusive Language Guidelines](#) for more information.)

I know it will take time to dismantle structural ableism in San José and beyond, and this work cannot be siloed in one office or with one person. It cannot be housed in compliance programs either. Therefore, I urge you to support the Disability Affairs Work Plan and portfolio.

Additionally, as an elected official serving our city, what specific actions will you take to ensure that equity is truly comprehensive and inclusive?

5/20/24, 10:33 AM

Thank you for your attention to this crucial matter.

Sincerely,

Michele Mashburn

Michele Mashburn

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