

**Testimony from Danielle Brown**  
**House Finance, Subcommittee of Health and Human Services**  
**House Bill 49—State Biennium Budget**  
**March 22, 2017**

Hello Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member Sykes and Members of the Health and Human Services Subcommittee. My name is Danielle Brown. I'm 33 years old from Knox County and I was born with spina bifida. I'm here to testify today on concerns related to community integration and the struggles I have getting around in my wheelchair.

By now you know that the federal government is making changes that are intended to allow more people to live and work in the community. This is a good thing. These changes are a continuation of the idea that the community should be accessible to all, which began in with the passage of the American with Disabilities Act in 1990—also known as the ADA. But now that more people are living and working in the community, the struggles of community integration are becoming more apparent.

It can be a struggle finding accessible places to eat, visit, shop, or work, within the State of Ohio. There have been many occasions when I try to access a building independently and I must rely on others to open doors for me due to the heaviness of the door. Have you ever made a decision on where to eat lunch based on how difficult it is to get into the building? This is my daily life.

Once I decide that I can enter a building, my concern immediately turns to the bathrooms. When I enter a public bathroom, there are many obstacles to get past in order to use the handicap accessible stall. If all the doors to the regular stalls are swinging outward, it becomes a daunting obstacle course to get back to the handicapped accessible bathroom. If I'm able to get to the accessible stall then I often have to deal with the baby changing station. If the door to the accessible stall swings inward then I'm unable to close the door behind me, due to my wheelchair, which invades my privacy. This again is my daily life.

The good news is that there are solutions. A solution to opening doors would be to ensure all doors weighing over five pounds have an automatic door opener that is electric to be available. A solution to the bathroom issue is to have a handicap accessible door with hinges that swing outward and not inward. Of course having wider aisles for a wheelchair and giving the baby changing stations its own area outside the accessible stall would be helpful too.

There are many seemingly simple solutions to update the ADA that could alleviate these barriers to community living. The problem is that it isn't clear who is responsible for ensuring that new and renovated buildings meet ADA standards. While we know that some changes (such as doorway sizes) need to happen in Congress, better local enforcement could make a big difference to people like me. We have been working locally to address these problems, but there isn't a clear understanding of who is ultimately responsible for enforcement of the ADA, or where people and their families can turn if the local government isn't responsive. It would be really helpful if you could look into this issue further. I know new builds still have issues with doors to heavy and stall that truly are not easily accessible.

While there are solutions to these issues, there is not one solution that will fix every issue. It will take time. All I ask right now is that the committee consider having the Legislative Service Commission research the ADA responsibilities of the federal and state governments, as well as who is responsible for enforcement locally. From there we can begin to improve the ADA in a meaningful way and make our communities more accessible for everyone. Thank you for allowing me to testify today.