



**Mayor's Office for
People with Disabilities**

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Testimony

of

Commissioner Nisha Agarwal

New York City Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities

before the

New York City Council

Committee on Disabilities

on

Oversight - Equal Economic Opportunity for New Yorkers with Disabilities.

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Good morning, Chair Hanif and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Nisha Agarwal, the Commissioner of the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD). I have short black hair and brown skin. I'm wearing a brown top and slacks. I have aphasia, and I have my handy cane by my side.

MOPD's mission is to ensure that New York City is accessible and inclusive for the more than one million New Yorkers with disabilities who live and work in our city. We do direct services, community engagement, strategic communication and policymaking at the local, state, national, and international levels for public and private stakeholders alike.

Employment is vital.

Data

First, I want to set the scene with some numbers. In employment for New York City:¹

- Just 40 percent of New Yorkers with disabilities of working age are employed, compared to 73 percent of the city's overall working-age population.
- And for those who are in the labor force, the unemployment rate is nearly double, 13 percent for people with disabilities compared to 7 percent citywide.

We also know that, on average, people with disabilities may spend approximately 20 percent of their income on disability related expenses, causing a strain on incomes.²

Furthermore, people with disabilities grapple with a tight housing market, inflationary costs on food and other necessary goods, transportation barriers, health care coverage considerations, and other everyday affordability matters.

¹ American Community Survey (ACS) data, 2019-2023

² Morris, Z.A., et al. (2026), "The Disability Squeeze: Out-of-Pocket Expenses and Unmet Needs for Disability-Related Goods and Services in the U.S.," *Disability and Health Journal*, doi.org/10.1016/j.dhjo.2025.101930

The bottom line – people with disabilities are feeling the burden of affordability issues, oftentimes at exacerbated rates compared to other New Yorkers.

As our Administration works to address many of these factors more broadly, we at MOPD are working to advance policy, strategic partnerships, and communications to move the needle as well.

Programs

A core focus of that work is on jobs for people with disabilities.

The dignity of work, the independence it can provide, and the ability to build a life in the city we all love.

For example, MOPD’s signature jobs program NYC: ATWORK has been active for nearly a decade, and it provides a continuum of individualized services to both jobseekers and employers.

For jobseekers, we offer career advice, resume and interview preparation, guidance on disclosure and reasonable accommodations, retention services, and support for those applying to City government.

On the employer side, we provide recruitment support, pre-screened candidate referrals, and personalized hiring events, among other services.

To date, our program has helped nearly 800 New Yorkers with disabilities secure employment, including a significant number as part of the 55-a program, a pathway for people with disabilities to secure employment with the city.

And since July 2023, in conjunction with our sister agencies and across the city, we count more than 3,000 people with disabilities having secured employment. Nearly 150 of which came through NYC: ATWORK.

While MOPD has been at the forefront of this work, we cannot do it without the partnership of our sister agencies and colleagues also committed to this effort.

Colleagues at the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS), at the Department of Small Business Services (SBS), and at the Mayor’s Office of Talent and Workforce Development (NYC Talent) all play a role in employment for people with disabilities.

Real Life Example

Finally, I want to share a success story so we can all put this work into perspective.

When asked what one of our clients liked about his job he said, "My work feels meaningful." He went on to offer advice to other job seekers saying, "Be patient; the right opportunity will come your way."

This client now works on health and safety issues at DCAS. He has a background in project analytics and has a graduate degree in transportation related issues. Prior to his role at DCAS, he spent 10 years in the workforce between internships, part-time work, and one full-time role.

He came to one of our job fairs in 2024 and worked through a year long period before a soft job offer turned into tangible employment. He was also able to utilize the 55-a program as a pathway to employment with the city.

He has a learning disability and one of his goals has been building his confidence in the workplace.

To that end, one of our career advisors has continued to meet with this client while he is on the job at DCAS.

They're debriefing about everyday issues the client faces, ways to build his confidence in his unit, and shaping his ongoing career trajectory.

That ongoing support from our career advisor continues for 1 year following employment and our advisor and the client have been meeting consistently for 8 months now. In other words, building momentum and helping the client firmly settle in.

This is just one story of a job seeker that has been touched by our At Work program. Showing the dedication of our staff and the powerful story of how patience, support, connection, and follow-up can impact our fellow New Yorkers.

So, let's keep pushing ahead, working together, and fighting to extend opportunities for people with disabilities just like the one highlighted here.

Our work makes a difference.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to answering your questions.