

PODCAST: 30th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ADA

CHAIRPERSON: Representative Christie
Carpino

REP. CARPINO (32ND): Hi, I'm Christie Carpino and I represent the wonderful folks in Cromwell and Portland, the 32nd House District and I'm lucky enough to have Amy Porter the Commissioner of the Department of Aging and Disability Services. We are just going to spend a few minutes talking about a milestone piece of legislation celebrating its 30th year anniversary, The Americans With Disabilities Act. Commissioner Porter, thank you for spending some time with us today.

COMMISSIONER PORTER: Thank you for inviting me.

REP. CARPINO (32ND): So this was truly groundbreaking legislation for families that have members with disabilities. I'm sure you have seen a tremendous amount with your tenure with the agency and with your one-on-one contact with families over the years. Can you tell us a little bit about the impact this has had on families here in Connecticut?

COMMISSIONER PORTER: Yeah, the ADA really was groundbreaking legislation. It's civil rights legislation for people with disabilities. And it's mandate is really to make sure that we stop discrimination, right, and it gives us the opportunity to show a national commitment to stopping discrimination for people with disabilities. So it covers really all areas of life. It covers transportation, it covers employment, it covers access to government entities. It's, this really all-encompassing legislation that

PODCAST: 30th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ADA

is designed to break down the barriers that society has put in the way of people with disabilities to enjoy both participation and access.

REP. CARPINO (32ND): So this is all about inclusion and I will tell you I can speak for my communities and communities across the State we're the better for it, our communities are richer because we've been able to include more members. I know we've come a long way. What have been the greatest impacts to our families because of the Americans with Disabilities Act?

COMMISSIONER PORTER: Yeah, there are so many impacts. I actually went back to look at some information about like what was life like before the ADA was signed. And I remember when the ADA was signed.

REP. CARPINO (32ND): So do I.

COMMISSIONER PORTER: I was in my Master's Program and so I found this list of things that before ADA was signed one thing people using wheelchairs who wanted to ride a bus or a train would need to abandon their wheelchairs. A restaurant could refuse to serve a person with a disability. A place of employment could refuse to hire a person just because of their disability and if they did hire them, they could pay them less even if they were doing equal work to somebody without a disability. So the world really has changed dramatically. There's still always room for improvement but if you think about what that world looked like and what it

PODCAST: 30th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ADA

looks like now, some of those areas of discrimination have been taken out of the way.

REP. CARPINO (32ND): And I know that everybody has benefited from that, those with disabilities and those without. Folks don't necessarily realize that those curb cut-outs if you're pushing a stroller, you have broken your ankle and you dealing with a disability of perhaps a temporary nature, we have the Americans with Disabilities Act to thank for that and there are many advantages in our day-to-day world that we have the Americans with Disabilities Act to thank for. We have many in our community with disabilities that aren't outwardly obvious. I know that many disabilities are invisible and this has helped many of those individuals as well. Your agency does a tremendous amount and sometimes folks don't necessarily know where to look for assistance with their disabilities because disabilities are all different, everybody struggles and needs a little bit of extra help with their particular circumstances particularly at COVID-19 and so perhaps limited availability for folks to be out and about. Is there some recommendations that you can give folks who maybe home a little bit more than normal now as to where they can reach out or seek some additional assistance?

COMMISSIONER PORTER: Yeah, our agency continues to operate. We are doing a lot of services virtually, you know, for everybody's safety. We are all going with the if we can telework, if we can make sure that we're not creating a lot of close physical contact that's great but our services are still available to everybody. So all the services that we had in place before with a couple of minor

PODCAST: 30th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ADA

exceptions. We haven't started doing driver training yet for people with disabilities because that requires close contact in the front seat of a car, right, so we're working on the strategies for that. But folks that are looking for employment, individuals with disabilities or older adults that are looking for employment we're still here and engaged and we're trying to work with people virtually to do the counseling piece, the interest piece, the individualized planning of what is it that you bring to the table, what are the skills that you have and how can we capitalize that on those and make sure that you get hooked up with a business who needs your services and your talents. So we're still doing all of that so they can certainly reach out to our agency and if for some reason we're not the right first step we like to be a place that answers the phone or at least returns phone calls in this Covid world, we're doing more returning phone calls than being no one's answering cause we're not sitting at our offices all the time. But we like to get people to the next best place for them so if we're not the right place we will let folks know where to go, where they can get the best access for services that they need.

REP. CARPINO (32ND): And is there a central phone number or a website that folks should go to?

COMMISSIONER PORTER: There are both actually, so our tollfree line is 1-800-537-2549 and then we have a local number as well here in our central office which is 860-424-5055 and our website is portal.CT.gov/ADS for Aging and Disability Services.

PODCAST: 30th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ADA

REP. CARPINO (32ND): Thank you. So Aging and Disability Services serves a wide-range of individuals and I will argue quite a large segment of our Connecticut population at one time or another, one of the places, this is just a personal opinion, of full disclosure that I think we still have room for opportunity in the world of inclusion is employment. Perhaps for both hats that you wear for those that start to follow the natural course of life and start to age and those who have a disability whether it is one they have had throughout their life or one that they perhaps acquire later in life as our situations change. Obviously, employment is a way for independence and financial stability. I know your agency and you in particular have really worked at this and I will follow up with you post Covid-19 but you have been a real champion. Is there some guidance you can offer for families and individuals who are really looking to make the connection for their skillset, their goals and employers or opportunities out there in Connecticut right now?

COMMISSIONER PORTER: Yeah, I think and it's such a great time with the ADA conversation and celebrating 30 years of this amazing legislation because the legislation really tried to tackle all of those overt kinds of discrimination components, right. But there's still people's perception and bias and so for business that have never hired somebody with a disability sometimes there are some pretty conceived notions, right, what that means but remember that disability is a wide-spectrum. People with disabilities are people first and all bringing unique skill sets to the table. Every one of us,

PODCAST: 30th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ADA

right, has our experiences that form us, our work experience, our education that helps kind of either fit us into a position or help us figure out that it is not quite the right position but that's true for every person including a person with a disability. And so for businesses I would say, you know, the best way to understand working with somebody with a disability is to hire somebody with a disability who's qualified for your job. We're not saying hire just any person with a disability. We're saying we will help you find the right match. We will help you find somebody and people with disabilities are untapped talent in the pool especially when there is a need for qualified employees, it is a great place to go to figure out to diversify your employee base and how to make sure that you are tapping into all the resources in our community.

REP. CARPINO (32ND): Thank you. I really truly believe that we all have something to offer and this is an opportunity to make connections that perhaps individuals didn't have. The 30th year anniversary is a wonderful time to do some reflection particularly for some of our business who may not know how to make those connections and your agency is a wonderful resources to teach businesses perhaps some of our smaller and medium sized ones who want to make these connections. We want to seek out and diversify and really enhance their workplace but maybe don't know who to do it. So we put you on the spot now. I know you've done this already but thank you for always offering those services and helping us make our community a little bit richer, helping us enhance our workforce by giving folks who truly deserve and really want and already have a skillset

PODCAST: 30th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ADA

to take advantage of these opportunities. We are the better to show our community that it's your agency that we have to thank. So I can't believe its been 30 years and I know we've come a really long way and I'm not naïve, we have a long way to go as well. I also remember where I was 30 years ago but I won't date myself and put that out in the world of Zoom for perpetuity. Commissioner, anything else that you want to leave our viewers with as we reflect on 30 years and what we've done?

COMMISSIONER PORTER: Yeah, we're as you know, we are in unprecedented times, right, with COVID-19 and the job loss that's happened throughout our community. People with disabilities typically when there is a recovery, typically lag behind so the unemployment rate grows for people with disabilities as it is improving for people without disabilities. So it's gonna take all of us. It's gonna take all of us as a community to think about how do we make sure that everybody gets reengaged in our economy and how do we think about the creativity of people with disabilities who, you know, again all individuals but some individuals with disabilities who are expert at technology because that's what they are using in the day-to-day life can help us now through, you know, think, reinvent visioning is what our new world is going to look like and how can businesses capitalize on the unique skills and perspectives and talents that are out there making sure that as we move through this virtual world or continue in this virtual world we make sure it is accessible to everybody, we make sure it is innovative and we make Connecticut the best place in the Country to live.

PODCAST: 30th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ADA

REP. CARPINO (32ND): Perfectly. There are individuals with disabilities who have amazing talents, they are our friends and neighbors and they are individuals first and foremost. Thank you very much for spending part of your day with me. I really appreciate it. Thank you for serving all of the citizens of Connecticut and I hope to see you in person soon. Take care.

COMMISSIONER PORTER: You as well and thank you for hosting this, it's great to have the opportunity to celebrate the ADA and to celebrate the accomplishments of people with disabilities. Take care.

REP. CARPINO (32ND): Thank you.