

The Honorable Jim Langevin
Testimony before the Committee to Modernize Congress
“Making the House More Accessible to the Disability Community”
May 27, 11:00am

You will give testimony before the House Committee to Modernize Congress. They have asked for 5 minutes of broad remarks.

Platform: Zoom: <https://ushr.zoomgov.com/j/1600519679>

Speech

Good morning, and thank you to Chairman Kilmer and Ranking Member Timmons, as well as the entire House Modernization Committee, for having me today.

As many of you know, I am the first quadriplegic to serve as a Member of Congress and a founding co-chair of the Bipartisan Disabilities Caucus. Accessibility of the Capitol complex has always been a priority for me, because the hallowed halls of Congress are where visitors from all across the country come to interact with their Representatives, listen to political discourse, and track legislation that can significantly impact their livelihoods.

Today, I'm going to briefly touch on three areas where we can improve, the first of which is physical accessibility.

Physical accessibility of the Capitol complex is something I think about daily, not by choice but out of necessity. The Architect of the Capitol staff have always worked with me to remove barriers - with no better example than their efforts to install a lift system on the House floor to make the Speaker's rostrum accessible. However, physical barriers in the Capitol - such as inadequate signage, lack of accessible restrooms, and improper curb cuts - still remain, a fact I am reminded of whenever there's a joint hearing in a room that I'm unfamiliar with. We need to ensure that the Office of Congressional Workplace Rights completes timely biennial ADA inspection reports, as required by the Congressional Accountability Act. We also need to provide funding to remove barriers identified in those reports, so we can guarantee that constituents and advocates who travel great distances to make their voices heard can enter the room to do so.

Accessible communication is another area where the House could be doing better. In an ideal world, each hearing, briefing, press conference, or other event would have Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services or sign language interpreters provided. However, these services are generally utilized only upon request, and, when requested, staff often don't know where to go to ensure they are provided. Additionally, we must continue working to bring Congressional websites up to date with accessibility standards, which requires two main components: accessible website design and uploading content in accessible formats.

Which brings me to the third area - staff training. Many House staff are simply not familiar with disability rights or accessibility services and procedures. By requiring staff to have accessibility training, we can help press staff put out communications in an accessible manner, enable administrative staff to handle internal and external accommodation requests properly, and ensure staff

with disabilities know where to request an accommodation without fear of it impacting their job.

The bottom line is that we must continue working to weave accessibility into the foundation of the House of Representatives, instead of remedying accessibility concerns only when they're brought to our attention. If we focus on the three areas I've discussed – physical accessibility, accessible communications, and staff training - we can make great progress as an organization. I appreciate your time and look forward to working with you towards a more inclusive House.