



DRA is a non-profit legal center whose mission is to advance equal rights and opportunity for people with all types of disabilities nationwide and internationally.



Mazen Basrawi, former DRA Attorney

DRA's interview with Mazen Basrawi who was chosen by Obama's Inaugural Committee to ensure adequate access for people with disabilities on Jan. 20, 2009 at the National Mall.

Which events did you plan access for?

As the official Disability Outreach Coordinator, I had to plan for accessibility for a variety of events, like the concert at the Lincoln Memorial, the parade and the inauguration and official inaugural balls that evening.

How many people with disabilities attended these events?

Well, it's hard to tell, but I know that the attendance of people with disabilities was sizeable.

DISABILITY RIGHTS ADVOCATES

ANNUAL REPORT 2009

I was told that most of the accessible areas were full, which I think is a great sign.

What was the trickiest issue?

Dealing with the size of the crowds and trying to determine how many people with disabilities were going to show up was the biggest issue, as well as the challenges with transportation. Another issue was how to make the various programs accessible to people with mobility, hearing, and vision impairments. For example, we offered simultaneous live audio description of the parade to people with vision impairments and open captioning on all the Jumbotron screens for people with hearing impairments.

Can you tell me about President Obama's commitment to disability rights?

Oh absolutely, the President is 100% committed to including people with disabilities in all aspects of the government as well as increasing employment, education and rehabilitative services for people with disabilities. His commitment to people with disabilities is unmatched in any administration.

Were you able to sit close to the podium at the Inauguration?

By happenstance, I ended up being fifty feet away from the stage. I was escorted to an area that turned out to be the VIP celebrity section. I ended up being in the same row as Oprah Winfrey, Smokey Robinson was a few seats away and Denzel Washington, Beyonce...it was really... it was really something.

And what is your next assignment Mazen?

Well that remains to be seen. [Laughing] I'll let you know.

READ ABOUT DRA'S INNOVATIVE WORK:

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EMERGENCY PLANNING, TELECOMMUNICATIONS & UTILITIES



"It's gratifying to use my legal skills to advance civil rights for people with disabilities, from issues as basic as using the telephone to those with life-or-death consequences, like emergency evacuations. I recently helped to prepare a lawsuit against the city and county of Los Angeles for their failure to include the needs of people with disabilities in emergency planning. Currently, the city provides most emergency announcements over loudspeakers or bullhorns, which excludes residents who are deaf or hard of hearing. Also, neither the city nor the county include accessible transportation or accessible shelters in their emergency plans, so if there is a need for evacuation, people with mobility disabilities could be stranded in their homes. These are some of the problems we are hoping to address with this lawsuit. I also represent consumers with disabilities before the California Public Utilities Commission which regulates telecommunication and energy companies."

Karla Gilbride, John W. Carson Fellowship Attorney and Guide Dog, Anya

Jantz v. Social Security Administration

DRA, with a consortium of plaintiffs' employment attorneys, continues to pursue this historic cross-disability class action against the Social Security Administration. The suit challenges the federal agency's dismal promotion rates of employees with targeted disabilities which include: deafness, blindness, missing limbs, paralysis, convulsive disorders, mental retardation, mental illness, and the distortion of limb or spine. The EEOC judge presiding over the case granted class certification in October 2008 and the Agency appealed. We recently concluded the appeal briefing and expect a decision from the EEOC within a year.

Western Regional Advocacy Project et al. v. Newsom et al.

Statistics reveal that two thirds of any homeless population are disabled; many suffer from mental illness. San Francisco's homeless policies blatantly discriminate against disabled homeless people. DRA has filed a lawsuit to challenge these unlawful policies.

Californians for Disability Rights v. California Department of Transportation

Disability Rights Advocates is challenging the illegal policies and practices of the California Department of Transportation (or "Caltrans") which have led to pervasive access barriers, such as missing curb ramps, a lack of detectable warnings and poles that narrow the sidewalks, along Caltrans' 2500 miles of sidewalk throughout the state. Caltrans has fought this litigation vehemently, even arguing at one point that the ADA itself is unconstitutional.

HEALTH CARE FOR VETERANS WITH DISABILITIES



"It is highly rewarding to know my legal work is advancing the lives of veterans. I am assisting with the appeal in our veterans case and am involved in several investigations to guarantee that all VA hospitals and facilities are accessible to veterans with disabilities. My work ensures that veterans with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) returning from our present wars receive the health care they need and deserve. Veterans with PTSD are among the troops who have suffered the worst due to the VA's failure to address their financial and health needs. Delays in treatment of PTSD often lead to alcoholism, drug addiction, incarceration, unemployment, extreme poverty, homelessness, or suicide. In fact, 33% of our country's male homeless population are veterans. Homelessness is a condition that is often tragically entwined with disability rights. DRA's current litigation addressing homelessness issues in San Francisco and Los Angeles similarly recognizes this connection."

Becca Von Behren, Skadden Foundation Fellowship Attorney

Thompson v. Sutter

DRA is working to implement a class action settlement with Sutter hospitals in California. Sutter is removing architectural barriers, acquiring and installing accessible medical equipment, and updating its policies to ensure appropriate care of patients with mobility, vision, and/or hearing disabilities. DRA co-counseled with Goldstein, Demchak, Baller, Borgen & Dardarian.

NFB v. Target

Most major businesses fail to take even simple steps to ensure access to their websites for people with disabilities such as the blind and dyslexic. Target's website was typical - it contained thousands of inaccessible images and lacked basic access features needed for a screen reader program to work with the site. DRA accepted the case to help bridge the "digital divide" faced by people with disabilities. Target eventually agreed to a settlement under which its website is being made fully accessible to people with disabilities. DRA co-counseled this case with two private firms: Brown, Goldstein and Levy; and Schneider Wallace Cottrell Brayton & Konecky.

NFB v. Law School Admissions Council (LSAC)

Leveraging DRA's success in NFB v. Target Corp., DRA is working with the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) to force the Law School Admissions Council (LSAC) to make its website accessible to blind law school applicants. The inaccessibility of LSAC's website means that blind or visually impaired students cannot register for the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) or apply to law school without help from a sighted person.

DRA'S NEWEST LAWSUIT ON BEHALF OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM



"Soon after arriving at DRA, I began working on DRA's efforts to respond to frustrated families struggling to get health care coverage for their children's autism. On February 11, 2009, we filed a class action against Kaiser regarding its systematic policy of denying children with autism equal access to the health care treatment they need. Kaiser denies standard medical treatments for autism like speech, occupational, physical and behavioral therapies, even though it provides many of these treatments to children with other disorders. Kaiser's policy hurts the health and future autonomy of these children and the financial and emotional well-being of entire families. Our case charges both discrimination, and violation of the state Mental Health Parity Law. Given the current public policy tempest around autism treatment and my personal background in both mental health and developmental disability work, I find *Anderson v. Kaiser* tremendously exciting work."

Anna Levine, DRA Staff Attorney

Smith v. Hotels.com

DRA reached an exciting settlement with Hotels.com and Expedia to make their websites more usable for people with disabilities. As part of this landmark agreement, the companies have agreed to modify their websites to allow people with disabilities to search for and book hotel rooms with accessibility features. Whenever a customer requests an accessibility feature, the companies will follow up with the hotel property to make sure the desired room is available. DRA co-counseled with two firms: Public Justice and Chavez & Gertler.

Balangitao v. Hayward Unified School District

DRA is very pleased to have reached a settlement with the Hayward Unified School District, following collaborative negotiations. The District agreed to make all of its schools accessible to students with disabilities over time, through barrier removal and ongoing modernization and new building efforts. The District also agreed to develop a plan to improve the District's special education policies and procedures. Significantly, the District evaluated and committed to these improvements because they furthered the educational process. The District was cooperative throughout, with the goal of implementing a great program to meet student needs. DRA will now begin work on implementation. DRA co-counseled with Disability Rights California, formerly known as Protection and Advocacy, Inc.

TO READ MORE ABOUT THESE CASES AND OTHERS THAT DRA IS PURSUING, PLEASE VISIT WWW.DRALEGAL.ORG.

DRA'S 15TH ANNIVERSARY GALA

Thanks to the many wonderful donors, sponsors and volunteers, DRA's 15th Anniversary gala brought in over \$430,000. Our major sponsors were: Robert and Colleen Haas • Michael and Maureen Sachs • AT&T • Chavez & Gertler • Goldstein, Demchak, Baller, Borgen & Dardarian • LD Access Foundation, Inc • Barbara Caulfield • Karen Kaplowitz and Alan Cohen • Patricia Kirkpatrick and Sid Wolinsky • Jeanine and Guy Saperstein • Kecker & Van Nest • Starbucks • Mobility Golf • Cotchett, Pitre & McCarthy • Munger, Tolles & Olson • JAMS • Schneider Wallace Cottrell Brayton & Konecky • Splice Communications • Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe • Zelle Hofmann Voelbel Mason & Gette • Inclusive Community Resources.



Left to Right: Bob Handy, Sid Wolinsky, Paul Sullivan, Ben Foss, Mike Stanley, Larry Paradis



Jan Garrett of CIL with Colin Petheram of AT & T



Leslie Aoyama, Board Member with Nordstrom colleague



Julia Pinover & Karla Gilbride, Fellowship Attorneys with Katie Weed, Senior Paralegal



Ben Foss with Anne Schneider, Board Members



Paul Sullivan, Veterans for Common Sense with Melissa Kasnitz, DRA Managing Attorney



Jose Allen, Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP Affiliates with the Honorable Judge Chen



Our future DRA Fellow, Rebecca Williford with law school friend, Noah Smith



Not only is Stephanie Enyart our future Skadden Fellow but she just won the American Association of People with Disabilities' prestigious 2009 Paul G. Hearne Leadership Award.

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