

The DC Commission on Human Rights & The DC Office of Human Rights

# 2023 Human Rights Awards Ceremony Protecting and Celebrating Bodies and Minds of All Abilities

**December 7, 2023**  
**Marion S. Barry, Jr. Building**



 GOVERNMENT OF THE  
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
DC MURIEL BOWSER, MAYOR

# WELCOME!

Dear Awardees, Colleagues, Partners, and Residents:

Welcome to our Annual Human Rights Awards Ceremony! We would like to extend our special greetings to those with disabilities who are here in the room. Thank you so much for coming!

Did you know that one in four Americans are disabled? As we all age, our chances of being disabled become exponentially greater.

And did you know that disability claims under the DC Human Rights Act are the third most docketed type of discrimination complaints in the District (following sex and race)?

We are fortunate to live and work in the District of Columbia with wide ranging human rights protections. The theme for our 13th annual Human Rights Awards Ceremony is: ***Protecting and Celebrating Bodies and Minds of All Abilities.*** Through tonight's event, we would like to highlight the great accomplishments in our District and country, and to underscore the work that remains ahead of us. We would like to highlight not only the state of human rights enforcement in our District but also the comprehensive assistance and advocacy afforded by it. And we wanted to celebrate our creativity, diversity, talents, and boundless energy by shining a light on those dedicated individuals and organizations that work with those in need of a helping hand.

We are very fortunate to partner with three DC agencies that provide advice and services to persons with disability and thank them for helping to bring this event to you: Office of Disability Rights, Mayor's Office of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing, and the Department of Behavioral Health.

We are also grateful for the many nominations we received from the members of our community. It is wonderful to know about the individuals and organizations active in providing advocacy, education, and programs which assist those with bodies and minds of All Abilities, and we honor all of them.

And finally, congratulations to this year's awardees, who, we are sure you agree with us, are well deserving of the recognition for the steadfast work they carry out in service to our communities.

Please enjoy our Ceremony about the protections we are all afforded in the District under the DC Human Rights Act!

Cordially,

**Hnin Khaing**, Director, DC Office of Human Rights  
**Motoko Aizawa**, Chair, DC Commission on Human Rights

# **2023 HUMAN RIGHTS AWARDS CEREMONY PROGRAM**

## **Refreshments**

### **Welcome Address**

Motoko Aizawa, Chair, DC Commission on Human Rights  
Hnin Khaing, Director, DC Office of Human Rights

### **This Year's Awards and Ceremony Theme**

### **Remarks from Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice, Lindsey Appiah**

### **Remarks from Director of the Mayor's Office of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing, Kari Cooke**

### **Awards Presentation**

Cornelius R. 'Neil' Alexander Humanitarian Award  
Emerging Leader Award  
Community Service Award  
Special Director's Award

### **Our Past and Present**

### **Reading of the Mayor's Proclamation**

### **Call to Action by Executive Director of Developmental Disabilities Council, Alyson Whyte**

## DC HUMAN RIGHTS ACT:

# PROTECTING AND CELEBRATING BODIES AND MINDS OF ALL ABILITIES

The theme for the 2023 Human Rights Awards Ceremony celebrates all levels of physical and mental abilities, and the event will honor the individuals and communities who dedicate themselves to improving the lives of people with physical and mental disabilities.

Did you know that an estimated 1.3 billion people experience significant disability around the world, representing 16% of the world's population? That up to 1 in 4 adults in the US have a disability? That persons with disabilities are still roughly twice as likely as nondisabled Americans to be unemployed and live in poverty? That workers with disabilities still face both overt discrimination and implicit bias? That people with disabilities are more likely to report poor health and experience higher rates of chronic health conditions than nondisabled people?

In the District of Columbia, the DC Human Rights Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of a person's disability, defined as a physical or mental impairment substantially limiting one or more major life activities (includes HIV/AIDS). This is one of the 23 protected traits under the Act. Disability claims under the DC Human Rights Act are the third most reported type of discrimination following sex and race.

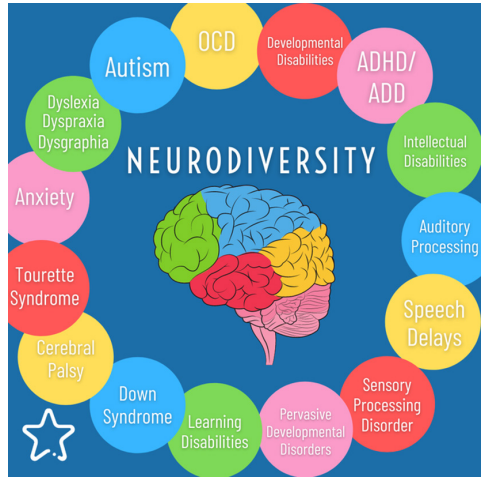
Even 33 years after the passage of the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the ongoing struggle for access and equality continues.

### **For example:**

- Some persons with disabilities die up to 20 years earlier than those without disabilities.
- Persons with disabilities have twice the risk of developing conditions such as depression, asthma, diabetes, stroke, obesity, or poor oral health.
- Persons with disabilities face many health inequities.
- Persons with disabilities find inaccessible and unaffordable transportation 15 times more difficult than for those without disabilities.
- Health inequities arise from unfair conditions faced by persons with disabilities, including stigma, discrimination, poverty, exclusion from education and employment, and barriers faced in the health system itself.

# INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSON WITH DISABILITIES (IDPD)

The annual observance of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) – **December 3rd**- was proclaimed in 1992 by the United Nations General Assembly resolution. The observance of the Day aims to promote the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities in all spheres of society and development, and to increase awareness of the situation of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life. On December 9, 1975, the United National General Assembly adopted the “Declaration on the Rights of Disabled People.” The declaration marked the beginning of a new conceptual approach to disability issues as human rights issues. Even more significant was the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted by the General Assembly on December 13, 2006, which enumerates the civil and political rights of persons with disabilities as well as such rights-related issues as access to education, health, and employment. The US has signed but has yet to ratify the International Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, the international standard with 164 signatories, which the ADA inspired in the first place.



In addition, **December 10th** marks the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), a milestone document in the history of human rights also proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly.

As we commemorate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, we recognize and celebrate the equal rights and dignity of people with disabilities everywhere and reaffirm our commitment to building a city where people with disabilities are afforded the opportunities, independence, and respect they deserve.

# PARTNER AGENCIES

Today's Human Rights Ceremony was organized in collaboration and with the following District Government Agencies that provide assistance and programs to support persons with disabilities in the District:

## **Office of Disability Rights (ODR), Matthew McCollough, Director**

The mission of the DC Office of Disability Rights (ODR) is to ensure that the programs, services, benefits, activities, and facilities operated or funded by the District of Columbia are fully accessible to, and useable by people with disabilities. ODR is committed to inclusion, community-based services, and self-determination for people with disabilities. ODR has been designated by the DC Council and Mayor to oversee the implementation of the City's obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), as well as other disability rights laws.

## **Mayor's Office of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing (MODDHH), Kari Cooke, Director**

The Mayor's Office of the Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing (MODDHH) was established as a result of the passage of DC Council legislation and signed into law by Mayor Bowser. The purpose of MODDHH is to advance the civil rights of the Deaf, DeafBlind, Deaf Disabled, Hard of Hearing, and Late Deafened (D/DB/DD/HH/LD) communities by ensuring and overseeing District-wide compliance with laws that affect the corresponding communities; as well as provide D/DB/DD/HH/LD District of Columbia residents with access to constituent development programs, resources, and services. MODDHH's mission is to address the important concerns of D/DB/DD/HH/LD residents through addressing a broad range of social and economic needs through strategic management of public and private partnerships, expertise on policy, community relations, civic engagement, building a cohesive community across all eight wards, and providing resources for marginalized D/DB/DD/HH/LD populations. The MODDHH tracks local D/DB/DD/HH/LD issues, concerns and proposals and annually presents these ideas to the Mayor and the DC Council. Home to the largest ASL using workforce in the United States, the District of Columbia will become a leader in Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing civil rights in the nation.

**Department of Behavioral Health (DBH), Dr. Barbara J. Bazron, PhD, Director**

DBH provides prevention, intervention and treatment services, and supports for children, youth and adults with mental and/or substance use disorders including emergency psychiatric care and community-based outpatient and residential services. The Department 's goal is to deliver behavioral health services that promote recovery, respect cultural and linguistic diversity, and are choice-driven through the Mental Health Rehabilitation Services system (MHRS) for community-based care. The MHRS system is based on individualized services and support. Services include diagnostic/assessment services, counseling, medication, intensive day treatment and crisis/emergency services. Individualized behavioral health services are supported by rehabilitation programs, peer supports, supportive employment opportunities, housing assistance and a range of community housing alternatives to facility-based care.

# CORNELIUS R. ‘NEIL’ ALEXANDER HUMANITARIAN AWARD

For almost twenty years, until his untimely death in 2007, Neil Alexander served as the Chief Hearing Examiner for the D.C. Commission on Human Rights. With extensive knowledge of discrimination law and a dedication to civil rights and social justice, Judge Alexander wrote numerous legal decisions that not only received regional and national attention but set precedents that would forever shape our enjoyment of rights in the District, in particular the rights of the LGBTQ+ population.

The Cornelius R. “Neil” Alexander Humanitarian Award recognizes the efforts and accomplishments of individuals who embody the legacy of Neil Alexander in their life-time contributions to the protection of many of the 23 traits protected under the DC Human Rights Act, resulting in a lasting impact on the quality of life of the residents, workers, and visitors in the District.

## **Tony Brunswick, Executive Director, Art Enables**

Tony Brunswick’s career has been defined by a deep commitment to justice and a desire to create a more equitable and compassionate world. Recognizing we all have a role and responsibility in the fight for human rights here in the District of Columbia and beyond, Tony has spent the past 25 years focusing his efforts on supporting and leading nonprofit organizations that advocate for the rights and wellbeing of others.



Most recently, Tony served as the Executive Director for Art Enables, Washington DC’s only art gallery and studio solely dedicated to amplifying the careers of artists with disabilities. Prior to Art Enables, Tony spent nearly a decade as the Chief Operating Officer for LIFT, an anti-poverty organization focused on helping families break the cycle of poverty. Earlier in his career, Tony worked with So Others Might Eat (SOME), a DC area non-profit committed to supporting low-income and homeless individuals and families. At SOME, Tony helped establish and manage a residential facility for individuals in psychiatric crisis while also serving as a therapist in SOME’s behavioral health department.

Currently, Tony is building his practice as a mental health therapist while providing consulting and coaching services to nonprofit organizations and



# art Enables

leaders. Tony also serves on the Board of Directors of Beyond Borders, a human rights organization in Haiti that helps people build movements to liberate themselves from oppression and isolation.

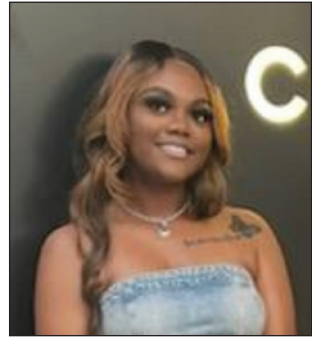
Originally from Ohio, Tony is a proud resident of Washington DC where he lives with his wife and two children. Tony is a graduate of Loyola University Maryland and the University of Dayton in Dayton, Ohio.

# EMERGING LEADER AWARD

The Commission is pleased to present this award to emerging leaders aged 30 years or younger, who exhibit extraordinary leadership in human rights awareness raising through advocacy, the arts, education, networking, outreach, or other similar activities.

**Peace McFarland, Student,  
Bard High School Early College DC**

Peace is the youngest of her small family of 3, consisting of her mother and older brother. Peace's young life has been manifested since she was a child. Her mother named her Peace because she says having Peace brought peace to her life. Peace's compassion and warm nature are shown through her advocacy for others. Peace believes that having emotional intelligence is the driving force of having a healthy lifestyle. Peace's involvement in the Youth Advisory Council (YAC) and volunteer experiences with the Anacostia Coordinating Council (ACC), Friends and Family of Incarcerated People (FFOIP), and Ward 8 Councilmember Trayon White, allows her the opportunity to change the narrative of the youth in the District of Columbia and become a change agent in her community. She uses these opportunities to share her insight and experiences to create safe spaces for youth to thrive and achieve greatness.



Peace is a Senior at Bard High School Early College DC (Bard DC) – a tuition-free satellite campus of Bard College, a nonprofit liberal arts college based in Annandale, NY, defined by academic quality, innovation, and its public service commitment. Through the partnership between Bard College and DCPS, students can earn a high school diploma, up to 60 transferable college credits, and an associate in arts degree from Bard College within four years free of charge. Peace will attend college in the fall where she will major in pre-law and psychology, disciplines she believes will propel her career aspiration of becoming a criminal defense attorney.

# COMMUNITY AWARD

This award is for a community organization active in the District of Columbia providing outstanding services to support the human rights of DC residents, workers, or visitors. This Award celebrates the significant contributions of an organization, rather than an individual, toward the protection and promotion of one or more of the 23 protected traits or the human rights enumerated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

## **Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc.**

In 1996, Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc. (AJE) was founded by two law students as a community-based organization in Ward 8 to empower, motivate, and educate parents with low income about the laws that govern special education and related services. Their belief was if parents knew about their and their children's rights and had the necessary resources and support, they would have increased involvement in their children's education and the skills needed to advocate for the educational services their children were entitled to receive. AJE's Executive Director Rochanda Hiligh-Thomas, a native Washingtonian, has led the organization since 2004.



**Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc.**  
The Parent Training and Information Center for the District of Columbia

Today, AJE is a parent-led organization whose mission is to empower families, youth, and the community to be effective advocates to ensure that children and youth, particularly those with disabilities and special health care needs, receive appropriate education and health services. AJE accomplishes its mission with only a staff of 12 working every day to protect the civil and human rights of D.C.'s children and youth.

AJE's reach extends to families with children ages 0-26 living in all eight D.C. wards, focusing on families furthest from opportunity. AJE utilizes a multi-strategy approach to achieve its mission: *Direct Assistance* to address a family's immediate issue; *Training* to increase parents' knowledge and capacity to self-advocate; and *Advocacy*, in partnership with families and other stakeholder partners, to bring about systems change through policy, legislation, and litigation.

Since 1996, AJE has successfully assisted over 10,000 families in accessing education, health, and support services and trained well over 15,000 parents on their rights and developed their skills to advocate for their children and collectively for all children. In 1999, the U.S. Department of Education designated AJE as the Parent Training Information Center (PTI) for the District of Columbia to support families of children with disabilities. In 2011, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services designated AJE as the D.C. Health Information Resource Center (DC HIC) (Family-to-Family) to serve families of children with special health care needs. AJE continues as the federally designated PTI and DC HIC today. In 2021, the Catalogue for Philanthropy selected AJE to be part of the Class of 2021-22 and named it as "one of the best nonprofits."

# A Brief History of Disability Rights

For a more comprehensive national timeline, refer to the 2023 D.C.: A Model for Human and Civil Rights booklet, a special edition for the annual Human Rights Awards Ceremony

1864

## Gallaudet founded

Gallaudet University is founded as a grammar school for deaf and blind children. Today, it remains the only higher education institution in the world in which all programs and services are specifically designed to accommodate deaf and hard of hearing students.

1918

## Smith-Sears Act

The Smith-Sears Veterans Rehabilitation Act of 1918 establishes a program of vocational rehabilitation for soldiers disabled on active duty. It offered a new concept in disability support—training for injured vets as preparation for their new jobs matching their “new” abilities.

1921

## FDR diagnosed w/ polio

Franklin D. Roosevelt, the future 32nd President is diagnosed with polio at age 39. He would go on to support the National Foundation for infantile Paralysis (March of Dimes) after becoming president. In recognition of his support, he is commemorated on the dime.

1947

## National Employ the Physically Disabled Week

National “Employ the Physically Handicapped Week” occurs October 6-12th. Using movie trailers, billboards, radio and tv ads, the Presidential Committee emphasizes the competence of people with disabilities and that it is good business to hire people with disabilities.

1954

## Brown v. Board

The Brown v. Board of Education case abolishes school segregation AND public schools were given permission to educate children with significant intellectual disabilities; Social Security Act of 1935 is amended to protect worker’s retirement benefits.

1973

## Accessible Parking and Curb Cuts

Title 34 is passed in D.C. prohibiting discrimination based on 16 traits, including disability; disabled parking stickers are introduced in DC; FHA authorized funds for curb cuts

1974

## “Ugly Laws” Repealed

Enacted between 1867 and 1874, these were a series of ordinances that targeted low-income people and people with disabilities. They allowed police to arrest and jail people for no other reason than being “disfigured” or having some type of disability.

1975

## UN Declaration on Rights of Disabled Persons

Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights enacted; Education for the Handicapped Children Act; UN Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons. It was signed by the U.S. in 2008.

1990

## ADA and Capitol Crawl

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) becomes law, providing comprehensive protection for people with disabilities; ADAPT organizes “Wheels of Justice” campaign (Capitol Crawl); First disability pride parade occurs in Boston, MA

1999

## Olmstead v L.C. and E.W.

In the most important civil rights decision for people with disabilities, the Supreme Court held that they had the qualified right to receive state funded support and services in the community rather than institutions.

2009

## Rosa’s Law Enacted

President Barack Obama signs “Rosa’s Law” into legislation, replacing the term “mental retardation” with the term “intellectual disability.”

2020

## Electric shock banned

Electric shock devices are banned for use on people on the autism spectrum or others with developmental or cognitive disabilities.



GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
MURIEL BOWSER, MAYOR

# MAYOR'S PROCLAMATION

December 7, 2023

**WHEREAS**, every December, the District of Columbia and the Office of Human Rights celebrate Human Rights Day, the global holiday that marks the day in 1948 when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and

**WHEREAS**, the principles of protecting our residents, employees, and visitors from discrimination are enshrined in the District of Columbia Human Rights Act of 1977, recognizing the inherent dignity, equality, and inalienable rights of all individuals within the District of Columbia, irrespective of their background, physical and mental abilities, and traits; and

**WHEREAS**, in recognition of December as Human Rights Month, the Annual Commission on Human Rights Awards Ceremony celebrates community leaders who have made strides in local and national human or civil rights; and

**WHEREAS**, this year's Human Rights Awards Ceremony, in collaboration with the Office of Disability Rights, Office of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing, and the Department of Behavioral Health, under the theme "Protecting and Celebrating Bodies and Minds of All Abilities," will acknowledge and celebrate the work of individuals and community who have dedicated themselves to improving the lives of people with physical and mental disabilities; and

**WHEREAS**, the city of Washington, DC, serves as a national model for civil and human rights legislation and leads the nation as one of the most progressive human rights jurisdictions;

**NOW, THEREFORE, I, THE MAYOR OF WASHINGTON, DC**, do hereby proclaim December 2023, as "Human Rights Month" in Washington, DC, and proudly commend this observance to all Washingtonians.

**Muriel Bowser**

Mayor, District of Columbia

# 2023 COMMISSION MEMBERS

Commissioners are appointed by the Mayor to serve 3-year terms without compenstion. Commissioners adjudicate private sector complaints filed under the DC Human Rights Act, the Fair Criminal Records Screening Act, and appeals under the Criminal Background Checks for the Protection of Children Act.



Chair, Motoko  
Aizawa



Vice Chair, Karen  
Mulhauser



Secretary, Charlotte  
Clymer



Stuart  
Anderson



Robert  
Baldwin III



Maria  
Burnett



Henry Floyd, Jr.



Lauren  
Lowery



Adam  
Maier



Teri  
Janine Quinn



Colin  
Rettammel



Anika  
Simpson



Antonesia  
Wiley

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## Special Thanks to:

2023 Commission on Human Rights

Commission on Human Rights Awards Committee  
(Motoko Aizawa, Robert Baldwin III, Adam Maier, Karen Mulhauser)

Office of Human Rights:

Director Hnin Khaing, Associate Director James Yu, Judge Erika Pierson,  
Judge Brandes S.G. Ash, Matthew Wiedmayer, Tyler Cargill, Dr. Mia Carey



The DC Commission on Human Rights & The DC Office of Human Rights

**2023 Human Rights Awards Ceremony**  
**Protecting and Celebrating**  
**Bodies and Minds of All Abilities**