State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations

Public Forums to Identify the Concerns of People with Disabilities and their Families

During the week of the 24th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (signed on July 26th), the Governor's Commission on Disabilities and many other state and non-profit agencies conduct a weeklong series of open forums to hear the concerns of people with disabilities and their families.

The forums are open for anyone to come in and speak; representatives of the sponsoring agencies will be there to listen. State policy makers and planners want to hear your concerns about current services, unmet needs, and suggestions for improving services and expanding opportunities.

Monday, July 21st, 2014, 1 – 3 PM

Zambarano Unit, Eleanor Slater Hospital, 2090 Wallum Lake Rd, Pascoag

Hosted by Alliance for Better Long Term Care / RI Long Term Care Ombudsman

Monday, July 21st, 2014, 4 – 6 PM

Woonsocket Harris Public Library, 303 Clinton St, Woonsocket

Hosted by Seven Hills Rhode Island

Tuesday, July 22nd, 2014, 2 – 4 PM

Warwick Public Library, 600 Sandy Lane, Warwick

Hosted by the Ocean State Center for Independent Living

Wednesday, July 23rd, 2014, from 5:30 – 7:30 PM

Middletown Public Library, 700 West Main Rd, Middletown

Hosted by Opportunities Unlimited For People With Differing Abilities

Thursday, July 24th, 2014, from 4 – 6 PM

Rogers Free Library, 525 Hope St, Bristol

Hosted by RI Statewide Independent Living Council & National Federation of the Blind of RI

Thursday, July 24th, 2014, from 4 – 6 PM

Charlestown Chambers, 4540 South County Trail, Charlestown

Hosted by Perspectives Corporation & National Multiple Sclerosis Society RI Chapter

Friday, July 25th, 2014, from 1:30 – 3:30 PM

South Providence Library, 441 Prairie Avenue, Providence

Hosted by RI Department of Health

Remarks can be made in person during the forums, faxed to 462-0106, e-mailed to GCD.Disabilities@gcd.ri.gov, or mailed by August 8th to Governor's Commission on Disabilities, John O' Pastore Center - 41 Cherry Dale Court, Cranston, RI 02920. CART Recorders (real-time captioning) and assistive listening devices will be at all sites, courtesy of the Office of Rehabilitation Services / Assistive Technology Access Partnership. The RI Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing will provide sign language interpreters for each forum.

To request information or accommodation, please call 462-0100 or 462-0101(tty) in advance; arrangements will be provided at no cost. Language interpreting is available with the Department of Human Services and requests can be made to 462-2130 in advance.

When making the ADA reservation with RIde to get to and from the public forum, tell the RIde reservationist (1-800-479-6902) that this trip is for the Governor's Commission's Public Forums in order to guarantee your return trip, after normal RIde hours of operation. ADA fare is still applicable. When attending the forum, please use unscented personal care products. Mild fragrances can constitute a toxic exposure for a person with an environmental illness.

Lincoln D. Chafee, Governor

The Public Forums' additional sponsors are: Arthritis Foundation RI Chapter; AccessPoint RI; Gateway Healthcare; In-Sight; Living in Fulfilling Environments, Inc; J. Arthur Trudeau Memorial Center; Neighborhood Health Plan of RI; RI Parent Information Network, Inc.; and RI Disability Law Center.

Thursday July 24, 2014 Bristol

RICK COSTA: It's 4:00, let's get started. Welcome to the Governor's Commission on Disability forum. We are proud to say that this forum is being co-sponsored by the Rhode Island Statewide Independent Living Council.

There's a couple of things I have to state before we get started collecting any testimony: I'm told that I have to tell everyone where the restrooms are. I believe if you go out the door to this room and just go right slightly and walk straight, you walk right into the men's and lady's rooms; make sure you enter the appropriate one. And, I'm also told that I'm supposed to tell you where the public phones are, and I don't know if there are any these days, so I have no clue where they are. But, that being said, we if do have anyone who is deaf or hearing impaired, we do have interpreters here and CART services, and we have assistive hearing devices for those who need them. See Alyssa, and she will give you whatever's necessary for you to be able to take part in this forum.

So, why are we here?

Well, we're here so we can identify any concerns that a person or persons with disabilities and their families may have. But, the purpose is to be sure that these concerns are used to form any type of legislation or policies to be able to enhance the lives of persons with disabilities and their families throughout the State of Rhode Island.

So, before we introduce ourselves, I do have to tell you that as a panelist, we're here to hear your concerns, and to ask any questions if we're not clear, so any questions to clarify what your concern is. We're not actually here to get into a full dialogue with everyone.

But, just keep in mind we only have several people, we'll be here for two hours, we only have several people signed up to speak, so, you know, I'm supposed to be able to time everyone.

I don't think that will be necessary. Just keep in mind that there are several others that do want to speak. So, I'll start with the introductions, and we'll move down the panel.

My name is Rick Costa, I'm the executive coordinator for Rhode Island Statewide Independent Living Council.

GRACE PIRES: President of the National and Federation of the Blind of Rhode Island.

DEB GARNEAU: From the Rhode Island Health Department.

JOHN VALENTINE: Rhode Island Department of Human Services.

BRIAN ADAE: I'm a staff attorney with the Rhode Island Disability Law Center, which is part of the national protective and advocacy system for folks with disabilities.

VINCENT DeJESUS: My name is Vincent DeJesus, acting co-chair of the Statewide Independent Living Council. I'm sorry, acting chair.

RICK COSTA: What happens with the testimony that we will receive today? The testimony will be collected after all the Public Forums are completed. They will be reviewed, and all the information will be documented and sent to your state legislators, both on the state side and the federal side, and hopefully draw some legislation, again, policy change, to, again, enhance the persons with a disability in your families in this state.

With that being said, I think we can take our first speaker, which is

ALYSSA GLEASON: Barbara Henry.

BARBARA HENRY: My name is Barbara Henry. I have a few concerns.

My first one is with Logisticare and Veterans. Veterans, right now, can't be dropped off at the VA, and that's a huge issue. And I was asked to bring that up today so that could please be explored.

BRIAN ADAE: May I ask a couple of questions? Am I correct there was another transportation provider prior to Logisticare?

BARBARA HENRY: It was RIde.

BRIAN ADAE: Is there any particular segment, folks with mobility issues, or across the board?

BARBARA HENRY: It's across the board, but it does impact people, definitely in wheelchairs, so I was asked to bring this up because they're having huge problems getting to the VA.

BRIAN ADAE: Do you have any idea of numbers, or what localities they may be coming from?

BARBARA HENRY: I don't have numbers, but I was told if they have 30 percent service connection, then they're eligible to get the ride to the VA. So, that's where it is conflicting.

Something where the ride doesn't appear, or they're being told, "No, there isn't transportation available," or it's delayed, late.

BRIAN ADAE: What happens? To your knowledge.

BARBARA HENRY: Well, with LOGisticare you have to have 30 percent service connection, and then a lot of the patients, it's just causing a lot of confusion. They're not being told accurate information. So, and if they were part on Logisticare, I don't know if they still have ADA, RIde services, but the VA does not provide for every single patient, you know, they'll pick you up, drop you off, VA Services.

GRACE PIRES: These are medical appointments, correct?

BARBARA HENRY: Uh-huh. But you have to have 30 percent service connector.

GRACE PIRES: So how did this change? This is Logisticare's rule? How did it change? It's a medical appointment. I don't understand why it would have changed.

BARBARA HENRY: I don't have all the details, but I was just told that a lot of people are not getting to the VA.

VINNY DeJESUS: I'm sorry. I was just going to say about the Logisticare, I was going to add, I do know what she's talking about. One of the many people who stopped using it, even though I use RIDE, it is a mess up, totally. As you see, I'm using my walker now, and for purposes of, like sometimes I don't have control if I can use the walker or if I have to use the wheelchair. For instance, RIDE, I have a wheelchair, and they always have it set up as "wheelchair," and I know Logisticare will come with a van. I know it's not just me, it's happened with many other people who use wheelchairs and they can't get to their medical appointment which causes a co-pay.

BARBARA HENRY: They'll show up with a taxi, and they need a van.

VINNY DeJESUS. It's not even really a taxi.

BARBARA HENRY: Well, a lot of the patients who use wheelchairs rely on Logisticare. They'll say, "Technically, we showed up," but they don't have the proper vehicle to transport the patient.

BRIAN ADAE: Brian Adae from the Disability Law Center. We have heard from a number of different sources, as we understood, we don't have a complete picture, but some of the services provided by RIDE are contracted out with the VA at this point in time, or fairly recently were done, and there have been difficulties.

MAJORIE McBRIDE: My husband goes to the VA every day on RIDE. Marjorie McBride. My husband uses the RIDE van every morning and every afternoon to go to the VA Hospital; he doesn't have any problem. He's in a wheelchair, and when the van isn't available, they send a handicap accessible taxi to take him there and bring him home, through RIDE. The VA, itself, does not transport people in wheelchairs, expect between the VA Hospital and their eye clinic and hearing clinic, which is, I can't remember the name of where it is, but they will transport them from the hospital to there. But they can't transport them back and forth.

GRACE PIRES: When he goes to the VA, is he going there for a medical appointment, or is he going there for other reasons?

MAJORIE McBRIDE: For both, and he pays $4.

GRACE PIRES. He's going under ADA, not medical appointment. I think the people going for medical appointments are having issues.

MALE SPEAKER: That's correct.

GRACE PIRES. He's paying for it. They don't care where you go, as long as you pay your $4. That's my understanding.

MAJORIE McBRIDE: That's not true. I don't know if they do it anymore, but they asked what his appointment is and when it is. Sometimes.

PAUL DELPAPE: But he, excuse me, if I could interject here. My name is Paul, if his visits are every day, he's paying way too much. He should only be paying $2 if it's a medical trip. If it's a medical visit, it should be only a $2 charge.

MAJORIE McBRIDE: Nobody ever told him that.

PAUL DELPAPE: Well, I'm telling you.

RICK COSTA: I think medical was contracted out to Logisticare. I think RIDE is doing ADA. It's $4 regardless. Even if it's medical, it's still $4.

PAUL DELPAPE: Well, the thing of it is, how did Logisticare get into play here? I talk to Diane Chappel at RIDE, they supplemented it out. Since I'm speaking, I might as well tell you a little bit about a mishap I had with them. I made an appointment to see a doctor, and I'm waiting, you know, supposed to be there at quarter of 11 and this and that, I waited the 15 minutes, called: "I called a week ago, you said I was all set, had my ride,' this and that. "And when I call you say, I was not on the manifest," and RIDE said it wasn't up to us, it was up to them, so everybody's blaming everybody. I said, "You know what?

Don't worry about it, I'll never use you people again."

The other part of it is, I don't know if you're aware of it or not, if you see doctors today, they take it upon themselves if you don't show, they're charging you regardless whether you're there or not. And I was very, very upset when that happened. So, everybody's blaming everybody, and nothing seems to be getting done about it or taken care of. I'll never use it again. I can't afford to throw money around at a doctor's office if they're not there to pick me up. I'm on a fixed income.

VINNY DeJESUS: One more thing I'd like to input. Recently, I started a part-time job, and I would have to go to aquatic therapy, which is pretty much around the corner, for my arthritis in my shoulders and my balance, and because it's going from work to the doctor appointment, Logisticare won't pick me up, even though it's not even a mile away from my house, and it's probably like two-tenths of a mile away from where I work.

So Logisticare pretty much started to save people money to go to doctor's appointments. You won't have to pay the ADA fare. It's not saving you money if you have to pay to go to your doctor appointment. It's a Catch-22.

Say you work until four, you have an appointment at five, you're going to miss it because if you get home at 4:30, Logisticare will be there.

For instance, I had a doctor appointment at four, and they said they were at my house at two. When I called at three and asked where they were, "Oh, we were at your house at two. " I was like, "No, you weren't, because I was right at my house. I stayed home just so I wouldn't miss you guys." But I didn't send anything up. I just

called RIDE and told them how they messed up. I didn't even bother filing a complaint with Logisticare because it goes nowhere.

They take their own complaints, and then nothing happens about it.

RICK COSTA: Before we go on to someone else, you have another issue?

BARBARA HENRY: Yes. The 2800 block in Pawtucket Avenue in East Providence, it is almost impossible to find a bus stop. I don't, I mean, I don't, it's very, very hard to find, to locate a bus stop to know where the bus is, and I've heard the busses go by. I wave my hand, they don't stop, I have my cane with me, and I really, I mean, this is, this can be taken anywhere in Rhode Island, I'm sure.

There's more bus stops that they're just not, they're not visible, not even visible to some of the drivers, and it's very difficult to find a bus stop. So, if that could please be explored, I'd appreciate it.

RICK COSTA: Thank you. Anyone else speaking?

TODD STEALY: My name is Todd Stealy. I just had a couple of quick things. Seems the common theme is transportation again. I will say this, probably 90 percent of the time RIDE is fantastic. Always right there. And if you get an actual RIDE employee, they're super, really know how to take care of people. The issue tends to come when they do the contract cab work.

Last week I had to reschedule another appointment again, because the cab was an hour and 45 minutes late. I started calling about 15 after, they said give us 15 more minutes.

And then I call back, give us a half an hour. Now, you're 45 minutes and getting really tight on my appointment.

Then it was like, well, you know, maybe we'll get to you in the next hour. So at that point, I call and cancel the appointment and reschedule, and then low and behold, I'm 45 minutes late and the cabbie shows up and demands I get in the car and go. Check back with your office, we cancelled with ride 30 minutes ago.

In all fairness, it seems to be one cab company more than another.

Checker is really bad. Their drivers tend to be rude. I had one tell me, Checker Cab tell me, the driver said, "I'm in front of your house." I said, "No, you can't be, you must be mistake." "Well, why can't you look out the window and see me?" I said, "Well, I don't need to look out my window because I'm standing in my driveway. And though I'm blind, I'm not deaf, I can hear you." And he was five streets over somewhere else. He got offended because in Warren it's called the "loop rotary." I said, "Sir, when we get to the third loop, you need to hang to the right." He said, "How the hell do you know, you're blind?" I said, after I've picked my face off the side of the window four times, "I used to drive because I wasn't always blind, and I kind of know where I am." So, without bashing a company, some of their drivers can be a little rough, to say the least.

We have a new cab company, I will say this, they go out of their way, they've been using to try to make a good way. Everybody has events and things happen, but for the general rule of thumb, the company out of East Providence just tends to have better customer service.

And the only other thing I'll throw in there about the busses, when the RIDE computers went down for three days, and the whole thing, my backup plan was to take the bus. On the way in to Providence, it truly was an accident. I was, I didn't want to get close to the street stay on the sidewalk be safe I thought a good idea would be to hold on to the bus stop sign, which was really good until the bus pulled in, took the mirror off, hit me in the head, the glass broke all around. I really felt bad for the driver, he was a wreck.

Picked up the mirror, swept up the glass, and off we go to Providence. I was fine.

What I really found to be rather disturbing was the trip home. I had never taken the bus, and when we looked at the schedule, going into Providence wasn't any trouble. Get off at Kennedy Plaza. I noticed on the way in it kept saying "stop requested," so I'm like this isn't -- I've got to come up with some kind of plan here.

So, on the way out, I knew they went 114, found the two little streets, the bridges that go into Warren, I basically knew where I was. I walked up to the driver, the stop at Joyce Street, right in front of the bank, is that a hard stop, or do you have to request it? The driver said, "You have to request them all." I said, "Okay." So I stood there and says that's the one, and I don't actually know, in his defense if I said I was getting off or that's the stop I wanted, but my interpretation was he knew I wanted to get off at that stop, and it seemed like we were rolling a little far. I said, "Are we going to make that stop?" He immediately slammed on the breaks, I picked myself up off the floor, and as I'm doing this he says to me, "You have to request the stop." I explained that's what I thought I did. You either have to push the button or pull the cord.

That's how you ask a stop.

Then I said to the driver, "I get it, but if I look out the window I don't see anything, so how do I know where I am as to requesting the stop?"

He says, "I'm sorry, you're going to have to figure out a better way. This isn't going to work. You people have to realize what you're doing." At that point, the conversation broke down and I got off the bus.

BRIAN ADAE: Sir, was that route 60?

TODD STEALY: Yes, it is. 114 that goes from

MARJORIE J. McBRIDE: He's absolutely right. Marge McBride. The cab company, my husband is scared to death sometimes of the drivers when he gets into the cab because they're a little crazy. They aren't on time, and he usually pleads with RIDE to get a van.

TODD STEALY: The ladies and gentleman at RIDE, the vans, do great work. If anything, I think sometimes they put up with a lot of grief from other RIDE passengers. On one occasion I told a passenger he needed to quit. It was a lady driver and he needed to hush. I didn't want this to turn into a RIDE bashing event. I think they do a phenomanal job.

RICK COSTA: Paul.

PAUL DELPAPE: Thank you for letting me speak. I live in Tiverton, I have for the past 14 years, a native of Pawtucket, Rhode Island.

I don't know how many people are aware of what's going on now, but right now Tiverton has, since I believe either June 22nd or June 23rd, has gotten bus service back again. There are three busses going into to the city, and three coming out. Back to Tiverton.

We had a hearing back in, I believe it was March to explain the theory of it and how the bus was going to run and stuff like that. The bus was going to stop at the Park and Ride, and you had to get to the Park and Ride to grab a bus.

With that said, I spoke to, I believe his name is Mark, that night, and of course I was talking about the RIDE program. Basically, he said to me, that the RIDE program would not be coming to Tiverton. So I said I thought wherever the bus service went the RIDE program went also, and he said, "Well, it's not up to me, it's up to the," I believe the initials are the "FTA," I guess stands for federal transportation association (sic) or whatever.

So he said, "Give me your phone number, and I'll call you and let you know the final verdict." I gave him my phone number, and never received a phone call. Still haven't received a phone call from him to this day.

Which, you know, any respect to him I think is kind of rude. He should have at least returned the phone call. I took the time to give you my information, you could have at least returned the phone call.

Anyway, the other issue I have is this RIDE program. I think it's a great program, but years ago, I don't know how many people know this, years ago, it was very independent. What I mean by that is out of Pawtucket you had Cozy. Out of Newport you had MAHA (phonetic). I think Providence you had Rhode Island Ambulance, and I don't know what Warwick had, but everybody was independent.

So I don't know what happened, but RIPTA said we're going to take over the RIDE program and handle it.

You know what? Since they've taken over, as far as I'm concerned, this program has been going down and down and down, and they just keep cutting routes out, you know, here and there, and wherever they please, and it's making it bad for people that, you know, I'm not saying just for blind people, this program is for everybody now, whatever disability you have, which, you know, is a great thing. And that's my gripe. I think transportation should be available for everybody in the State of Rhode Island. Whether you live in Foster, Newport, anywhere.

You know, and of course the thing is, they always throw in your face, "Well, we don't have the money." I think people are sick and tired of hearing "We don't have the money." Sure, we have family, certain members of the family have to work; therefore, they can't be carting, whether husbands, wives, sisters, brothers, cousins, whatever, we like to be independent as much as we can be, and I think this corridor needs to be expanded a great deal so everybody can be served in the State of Rhode Island.

Now, I don't know what it takes, I know one thing it probably would take, somebody would have to propose a bill and the laws would have to be changed to make this program work.

Yes, it works efficiently for some, but not for all. Thank you.

RICK COSTA: Marjorie McBride.

MAJORIE McBRIDE: My husband is an amputee, 100 percent-Disabled Veteran, and he uses the RIDE program every day of the week. We don't have any problem with the program at all. They're very good to him.

We have had a couple of problems, so I'm here to represent the problems that he has had.

For those of you who don't know, he runs an amputee support group at the Veteran's Hospital, and he's been on your TV program talking about what he does there. We went to the East Providence Boys & Girls Club to watch two of our grandchildren swim in a swim meet, it's not handicap accessible.

So I called the East Providence, the town of East Providence, and they said Well, we just put a brand new addition on, and we didn't make it handicap accessible and we don't have to.

I tried to call your office, but all I got were answering machines, so I left a couple of messages. I didn't get any return calls, but I'm here to tell you, if it's a Boys & Girls Club, boys and girls have handicaps. When you get into the building, the men's restroom is up a flight of stairs, the women's is d own a flight of stairs. So you couldn't function if you got in there anyway.

And I don't accept that the Boys & Girls Club, which receives funds from all kinds of people, is not handicap accessible.

What they did offer my husband, there were three firemen there, they said, "We'll be glad to lift you in your wheelchair through the back door so you could sit at the pool and see your grandchildren swim." That's not acceptable.

BRIAN ADAE: When you said you called our office, who did you –

MAJORIE McBRIDE: I called the phone book. He's only been an amputee for four years. We're new to the -- when you have a knee replacement and you get MRSA, you lose your leg. We're new to the whole system. The VA has been very good in hooking him up with different things that are available, but I do know this from being the chairman of the committee that built the schools in Bristol, we had to work very, very hard to make sure that all of our buildings were handicap accessible at the same entrance that students went into who were not handicap. I question why this building is not.

The second thing my husband asked me to tell you is that handicap bathrooms do not service him.

They rely on upper body strength, they don't rely on leverage. Even when he has his artificial leg on, he cannot stand up or maneuverer from his wheelchair into the bathroom. It's an issue at the VA Hospital, everywhere he's been, except for the Coast Guard Academy, which happens to have a beautiful restroom. He asked me to mention that.

The third thing is, if you take a walk down Hope Street here in Bristol, it meets the criteria, but I defy anybody to do it in a wheelchair. He can't get to the bagel shop in the morning where I go to coffee. He can't go to restaurants along Hope Street because he can't get there because the slope is too steep.

So a lot of times, there's a soup kitchen on Hope Street, we'll sit, my friends and I sit out there and help people who are handicap cross and come up because they can't do it.

So, those are some of the issues that we're facing.

We are very lucky with RIDE. We're also very lucky we can afford the $4 each way every day, and RIDE's very good to my husband, but I'd like to take the people in East Providence and strangle them, because that was probably one of the most embarrassing moments he's ever experienced.

BRIAN ADAE: Would you care to speak to me afterwards, if possible?

MAJORIE McBRIDE: Sure. Thank you.

ELLEN CRELLER: I'm Ellen Creller, I'm with a program called Accessible Rhode Island. We have done a lot of assessments on the Boys & Girls Clubs with handicap accessibility.

Done the Boys & Girls Club, YMCA, a lot of wellness center, attractions around Rhode Island, restaurants, we spend days in Bristol. It's very difficult in the old towns.

I'm going to talk to my colleague Debbie about the East Providence Boys & Girls Club. I didn't do that, personally. Part of our work is to get people to understand.

FEMALE SPEAKER: It's my understanding you can't take federal funds if you're not handicap accessible.

They said they just made improvements. Did a whole new front, and I'm thinking have you ever heard of one of those elevators you put in and it brings you up.

ELLEN CRELLER: I seem to recall something about an elevator, I'm not sure if it was in the process of being fixed or something like that.

FEMALE SPEAKER: I would hope. Thank you.

ELLEN CRELLER: But I want to let everybody know about the program, as well. We try to address transportation issues, as well. We have a page, it's a brand new website. I can leave materials. It's very exciting. We're working with the office of Disabilities and Health, as well.

We have dining restaurants, places to stay, branching out into facilities, as well, so people who know what the facility has in terms of handicap accessibility features, and make their choice from there. There's telephone numbers, addresses.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Thank you, I'd like that.

ELLEN CRELLER: I actually wrote my name and number down for you.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

ELLEN CRELLER: You're welcome. It's visitors to the state, as well, we're continuing the work and if anybody wants to get in touch with us about anything, please do. Are there any questions?

FEMALE SPEAKER: I have one question. I asked the bagel shop why they weren't handicap accessible. If you have less than 24 seats in an establishment you don't have to be; is that correct? I don't know the answer to that one.

ALYSSA GLEASON: No. No. That's not correct. You can talk with me after, too. I'm from the Commission.

But any place you go in that is a place of public accommodation where the public can go into it even if they say, "This is a private establishment," if the public's welcome there, it needs to be accessible. The only time where someone may be able to say they don't have to be and get away with it is if it's a historical building and they can prove it would ruin the integrity of the building by changing things, but everything else should be accessible.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Even in terms of being built prior to 1990?

ALYSSA GLEASON: If they were built prior to 1990 and have done nothing to the building since then, they have been grandfathered in. If they have done anything to change the building in the last 24 years, which most have, they should have used at least ten percent of their budget to make the building accessible.

FEMALE SPEAKER: That's very interesting. I didn't know that either. All those shops there.

ALYSSA GLEASON: Very few places have not been updated at all in 24 years.

RICK COSTA: Thank you. We have no one else that has signed up to speak, but if anybody who has come in a little late or just wants to make any type of comment can do so now. Otherwise, we'll take a break and if someone comes in...

FEMALE SPEAKER: I'd like to say thank you for taking the time to come to us. It's not easy to go to you all the time, navigating Providence and navigating in the wheelchair, it's not always that easy. I really appreciate you came here.

BRIAN ADAE. May I put in a shameless plug about voting? We register. I have registration to vote. If you have moved recently, we have the necessary documents. Add that small piece in there.

GRACE PIRES: Since we're speaking of voting. Regarding voting, there is accessibility for voting. People who have visual or other disabilities that can't use the normal, the ballots, they can use the automark machine and every precinct should have an automark machine.

BRIAN ADAE: I'll ask you about that.

ALYSSA GLEASON: The Commission went around in the spring to every single polling place, I was part of that project, they should all be making changes to be accessible. If you go to vote in either September or November and your polling place is not accessible, you're more than welcome to call my office, I'll give you my phone number, and file a complaint, because there's no excuse. We've given grant money, so everybody knows, they all should be accessible.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Does that include big hills?

ALYSSA GLEASON: As much as they possibly can, they should. Whatever's necessary.

RICK COSTA: Okay. So we shall take a break. We're all here until 6:00. If anybody else should come in and wants to speak, we'll be here, but right now, we'll take a break until then.

(BREAK)

RICK COSTA: We're going to turn the floor over to Jim.

JIM CARNEY: I wasn't able to get here earlier because the RIDE bus was late.

One of the concerns that I had recently with this whole switching around the bus stops in Providence, right from the beginning, I don't know how many people looked into it, but it was a real eye opener, pardon the pun, for somebody like me that's visually impaired. They told you to go to their website and look to see where the bus stops have been moved to and on their website, they had a map with all the bus stops listed, and which busses went to which stop; however, it was a graphic, so my screen reader wasn't able to read it to me. It was kind of like there was no thought given to that.

I was lucky I had my wife, but the problem with that was that even with the help of my wife, she's not familiar with Downtown Providence, so she was looking, oh yeah, the 55 bus comes here, but then, you know, she wasn't really able to tell me where that was.

So it was really kind of an interesting experience going there the first day.

When I got down there, the signage, there was no tactile signage, there wasn't any braille, and the signs that they had, while they may technically have met the standards in the Americans with Disabilities Act, they really weren't accessible for somebody visually impaired. They're on a white background with a shade of red that really was not enough contrast, and I don't think they were big enough for somebody to see.

I brought this to the attention of the one of the supervisors, and they sent me an e-mail asking me for suggestions, and that was as far as it went, as far as I can see.

It was just, you know, we'll send an e-mail, listen to you, but we're not really going to do anything.

So I think the whole thing was done without any thought to visually impaired people. I don't really think that's unusual for RIPTA. They try to meet the standard, but they don't really think about, well, maybe, is the standard good enough?

I personally don't think it is, and I think they could do some things that are really not going to cost them any more money, or if it does, it's not going to be a heck of a lot.

I'll be interested to know if anybody else shared my experiences.

BARBARA HENRY: This is Barbara Henry. I definitely shared your experience. I was traveling last Thursday to come here with another woman that's blind. We were Downtown, we had a supervisor, Karen from RIPTA, and the bus driver let us off in Warren. So, I walked into a building, and I was on the phone with RIPTA and explaining and saying I don't know where I am. I found out it was Citizens Bank, and all I kept thinking of was I'm happy it was still working hours. What if they closed? I had no way of letting the person know where I was or anything. I did not know where I was, and I saw that supervisor again and told her what happened and she didn't really seem very receptive. Very passive.

FEMALE SPEAKER: That's RIPTA for you.

MALE SPEAKER: Sounds like you got my requested stop that I didn't request before he slammed on the brakes.

My only thought on Jim's thought is before they make the changes, I would assume there's policy discussion, and RIPTA gets a group of their folks together. Is there anybody on the committee or even ad hoc that's disabled at all?

ANGIE STABILE: I'm part of the transportation committee, and we had lengthy discussions on how to make things accessible for all impaired. We'll take it into consideration. Barbara's on that committee with me, so she knows.

It's just, oh, you know, trying to pass us off. It's the same BS, different day. I can quote you their response. I know it like the back of my hand. It's just sickening. They know I feel this way so, I'm not saying anything they don't know.

PAUL DELPAPE: I'd like to make a comment, if I could. Paul. We had this ADA Act, American with Disabilities Act, and talk about all the buildings have to be accessible, it's all part of the ADA.

Should be the same thing in transportation. Should make transportation part of the ADA, and seems to me from all the people I hear talk today they do what they want to do and la-de-da, deal with it.

MAJORIE McBRIDE: In defense of all of those people -- this is Marge McBride -- until four years ago, I never thought of you. I never really thought about what you faced every day. I never really thought about not being able to go places and do things, and then my spouse couldn't do that anymore. I started to think about it. It doesn't make it right, it means we really have to do a good job with educating people who haven't experienced it. I don't think we're doing that. I don't know how to do that, I don't have the answer, I'm just telling you that that's how I look at it.

I see the world very differently now than I did four years ago.

So, while it's extremely frustrating to deal with them, I'm getting it, I'm just not accepting it.

ANGIE STABILE: This is Angie, again. You know, I join every committee, write letters, bring up concerns, and Barbara and Paul, and Grace that's sitting up front there. We educate. It's just they're not getting it, or I don't know, do they want us to make a sign, rent a plane, and fly a banner around? I don't know how more clear we can make things.

FEMALE SPEAKER: You hit them in their pocketbook.

MALE SPEAKER: I have a suggestion. Why don't we approach Scott Avedisian, the Mayor of Warwick.

I doubt anybody here is a voter in Warwick, get somebody who is visually impaired who lives in Warwick voting for Scott, and see them as a constituent and approach him and have him do an exercise, or solicit him to do an exercise with some of these people at RIPTA and take them out for a day, put them so they can't see, give them a cane, and say "Here you go."

FEMALE SPEAKER: That's what I said to the people –

MALE SPEAKER: I think that would be an eye opener, again, pardon the pun, but that would really maybe wake them up a little bit if they actually had to experience what the visually impaired person experiences.

FEMALE SPEAKER: I offered our government here in Bristol, which is a small town, a wheelchair for a day to allow them to do their day's work in a wheelchair, and they refused. So I get it, I just don't know what the answer is, but I get it.

MALE SPEAKER: Jim, I would tell you, they've already proven that it works, just what you just said, put them in and they get a better perspective. I've only been blind for a year, by the way, so I go along with Miss McBride. I didn't know anybody who was blind until I went blind. For 50 years I went around thinking everything was great until somebody turned the lights out.

I would say this, the RIDE van drivers, as part of their training, they've had the occluder training. I only found out because I was talking with one. Part of their customer service and they really understand what it's like.

And how disoriented you could get and all the things we know.

The program's already worked because they've done the pilot, but maybe we need to do it with a few of the administrators, probably solve a lot of problems.

MALE SPEAKER: Needs to be the people in management that are setting the policies.

ANGIE STABILE: I think Mark Therrian needs a good dose.

MALE SPEAKER: Can we spin him four times before we send him loose?

PAUL DELPAPE: I'd like to make a comment. Paul. Mayor Avedesian, he is a nice man, and he is on the board. I don't know how far it would go. He'd tell you to go talk to Mark Therrian first. My interests in Mark are not very high, let me tell you.

We had a hearing in Tiverton, like I said earlier, because Jim, I don't know if you know or not, but now Tiverton has bus service, we have three going in and three coming out of Providence on a daily basis, except, I believe, Saturdays and Sundays, it does not operate.

But, as I said earlier to the people that are here, we have the bus service, but yet we don't have the RIDE program, and I was under the impression that where the bus service went the RIDE program went and I brought it up to Mark and he said they're not going to allow the RIDE program to come to Tiverton because of the bus routes. I said why not? He said, "That's not up to me, it's up to the FTA."

ANGIE STABILE: Federal Transit Authority.

PAUL DELPAPE: To make it even worse, he says, "Give me your phone number, and I'll call you when I let you know what's going on for sure." I gave him the phone number, never received a call. I don't have too much respect for him.

BRIAN ADAE: Brian Adae from the Disability Law Center. One question I had asked when you were talking about that issue earlier:

When you broached with Mr. Therrian at RIPTA, the RIDE service, was it within a certain area of where the bus operated in Tiverton, or was it outside of, I'm not sure of how many blocks?

MALE SPEAKER: A point seven-five mile corridor of the established bus route. I can look up the CFR for you.

BRIAN ADAE: Do you know if it was within the corridor, or was he talking just in general that we're not going to go over the Sakonnet River Bridge, period.

MALE SPEAKER: The second thing you said. What I would be asking for as a starter, if the RIDE program would come to the Park and Ride where the busses pick up and he said no.

MALE SPEAKER: They have to do that.

MALE SPEAKER: Then somebody better take it up with him.

MALE SPEAKER: I had some problems with him, and he actually quoted federal regulations, and he said there was caselaw to back up his position. And when I asked him to cite the federal regulations to give me the citations to the caselaw, I never heard from him again. So, I consulted the American Civil Liberties Union, and they were very helpful, looked up some things for me, and the caselaw that he cited and the CFRs that he cited, he was wrong, and when I brought that, after a couple of months with no reply, I contacted him again, and I said, "Okay. Here's the CFR that you're talking about." He got back to me and said, "No, no, no. We don't function under that CFR." At that point, I complained to the Federal Transportation Authority, and they told me, I mean, my case was not settled in my favor, but they alerted him that this guy's right, that CFR that does apply to you.

FEMALE SPEAKER: It's such a small state. Why can't we take care of each other?

MALE SPEAKER: The other thing I want to talk about or mention, Paul here again. You know, nothing for nothing, but, the babyboomers are starting to kick in, and we're all getting there, and I'll tell you, the best is yet to come, because I think people are going to start screaming and yelling.

Why don't we have transportation?

And I want to say one thing right now, is that I want to thank whoever set this forum up today. I think it's a great idea, and I hope this information that has been talked about today and discussed, I hope somebody really gets to hear our concerns, I really, really do.

Because having these forums, I think, is one way that we can be heard, and I hope somebody gets this info and hears us, I really do.

JIM CARNEY: Jim Carney again. Another issue I have, formerly, on Kennedy Plaza, the signage was not great, but at least an attempt. I go to the corner of my street, there's a bus stop right there. And I know where it is. I go someplace else until the city, I have no idea where the bus stops are.

Like Smith Street or Chalkstone Avenue, Academy Avenue. There's no way for me to identify the bus stops unless there's a shelter there.

FEMALE SPEAKER: I said the same thing.

JIM CARNEY: They used to have a bright colored yellow band around the telephone pole where the bus stop is. Now, they have a no parking size sign on the poll.

FEMALE SPEAKER: And you can't wave to the bus, they don't stop.

JIM CARNEY: Even if you're at the stop, sometimes they blow by. I've had that happen.

BARBARA HENRY: This is Barbara Henry. In the wintertime it gets challenging -- going back to people in wheelchairs and using walkers -- they're not shovelling. Even people who can walk, it's very challenging to get on the bus with piles and piles of snow, and also just sometimes crossing streets there's not enough lights, possibly audible lights to assist a person crossing the street.

JIM CARNEY: I think there's a lot. And the thing that really, this is Jim Carney again, these are easy fixes. It's not multi-million dollar technology, it's some basic improved signage. Vinyl band or something to put around a telephone pole.

BARBARA HENRY: But they could put a chip in that sign, which beeps on your phone or beeps on whatever you're carrying, it tells you you're within 50 feet of a bus stop, too.

JIM CARNEY: That would be great.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Those are simple things to do if you had an App.

JIM CARNEY: That would be great.

FEMALE SPEAKER: They can have an App to play Crazy George or whatever my grandchildren play, and it costs .99. It can't cost much to put a chip in and for you to buy the App.

JIM CARNEY: And then they'd make money out of it.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Of course they would. With your cane or beep on your wheelchair.

MALE SPEAKER: I think the phone would be a great idea.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Listen, if they can, if you can go on the highway at 70 miles an hour and they can pick up your toll reader, they can put a chip in the sign.

MALE SPEAKER: I agree.

RICK COSTA: Barbara, can I ask you a question? I want to go back a little bit. You were looking for the 60 bus stop, you were looking, and the supervisor showed you where that bus stop was?

BARBARA HENRY: Yes. Last Thursday.

RICK COSTA: Would you be able to find that bus stop without that supervisor today.

BARBARA HENRY: Now, yes, it's across the street from the post office. Can I say something else, please?

I'm a mom and my son has Autism, and as many of you know, people with Autism tend to wander. And this, I was not even aware of these meetings until a year ago. A few years ago my son wandered, he left our apartment in the middle of the night, I did not know, and the police called, he knew his number, so the police found him and called me.

And when they returned my son, Justin, I was treated very, really, really bad. It was really not a good experience, and when I got my son and we got in our apartment I realized the keys were missing, so I said I think the cops took the keys. And the next night, nine o'clock at night, I'm going to bed with my son, after getting over, you know, and someone knocks on my door; it's a police officer. I never called the police.

And he said to me, I said, "Can I help you? Because I didn't call the police."

He said, "Oh, some woman found your keys." I opened up my door and he knew I lived in an apartment building on the third floor. You had to buzz in.

It wasn't like you just walked in the building. And he got up the stairs, I don't know how, knocked on the right door, and when I opened up my door and I said, "Can I help you?" He said, "Where were you? Where were you?"

Like that, really, really loud looking me up and down and just -- and I was in shock because I was like, "I didn't call the police." He was like, "Where were you?" And I just said, "Can I see the keys?" I took the keys, I shut my door, and then I literally had my back to the door and my heart, at that point, was racing. I felt, I was like, I never called the cops, I don't even know how this could just happen.

BRIAN ADAE: Mrs. Henry, what police department was this?

BARBARA HENRY: East Providence.

BRIAN ADAE: About how long ago did this happen?

BARBARA HENRY: About three years ago. I was walking down the street with my son on Pawtucket Avenue, and a police officer came to me and said, "Oh, is everything okay?"

Like a week later. I'm going to be honest with you, I turned around and told him to go (*) himself. How do you have a right to come up to me, or even -- I never called the police.

I mean, there was no, I mean, he wandered, he was returned, there was no other involvement with any other agency, but after that experience, I wouldn't call a cop if I was dying.

ANGIE STABILE: This is Angie again. They want to stick it to you. I live in East Providence, I know how they are. The East Providence police are known for being bullies. I'm going to share an experience that happened two summers ago.

There was a neighbour -- thank the Lord he's gone -- that lived in my apartment building, and he was not the cleanest person, didn't take care of his dog, such and such things, and somebody called the police on him and said my apartment number, so the cops, they have a passkey to our apartments and they have a passkey to the main door, so that's how they get in. He comes, opens my door, this is ten o'clock in the morning on a Saturday. I was indisposed. Didn't expect anything, you know, and this cop comes in my door. I was just like, what the

hell. I have a scanner, too, I wasn't paying attention, I had it off, and just hanging out on a Saturday morning in your panamas. And he goes, "Where's the dogs you're choking?"

I'm like, "What?" He barged in my house. Then he took my cat. And, "All right. This is a cat. Where's the dogs?

Where's the dogs?" I don't have a dog, and I wouldn't hurt an animal.

The East Providence police are bullies, and you can put it in the record, I don't care.

They're not nice people.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Do you have any recommendations about what we can do, other than coming to these forums, to help make change? You've listened to a lot of people.

BRIAN ADAE: Vote.

FEMALE SPEAKER: I always vote.

BRIAN ADAE: So, I'm sorry, generally speaking, as explained is the Governor's Commission on Disabilities, we, as panel members from various organizations, we work for, we are here to listen, and this gets passed along. The transcript is made of these hearings, and the Governor's Commission for Disabilities circulates that to policymakers. Sometimes the issues are identified out of that to the various agencies and will hopefully assist in addressing them. There were a lot of RIPTA issues in here. I know that sometimes, there used to be a representative from RIPTA that isn't here today. Perhaps, that's something that can be addressed.

We can't really answer questions, specifically.

As far as, generally speaking, I think part of it is to go, as some of you do and have tried with varying levels of success, is go to the agencies directly and complain. Like with RIPTA, you're doing that, not working well. Maybe some of the other places, issues with the police, maybe not internally with the police department, but with the city, East Providence. Three years later down the pike is a little bit late, I know, with those problems, but those are the start.

Developing awareness about the resources that are out there to assist.

I don't know if we have any, there is no centrally located directory of resources, but you can begin to look, for example, for Adults with Developmental Disabilities has a number on their websites, she's aware of that.

They also behavioral health -- am I -- I apologize.

JODI MERRYMAN: I'm Jodi Merryman.

FEMALE SPEAKER: I know this young lady.

BRIAN ADAE: There are a variety of places to go.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Once it's put together, is it a public document. The document you put together is that a public document you circulate to?

BRIAN ADAE: The Governor's Commission, we're not from the Governor's Commission, per se.

FEMALE SPEAKER: The information is a public document?

ALYSSA GLEASON: The transcripts will be on our website probably around November, once we get them back and go through them. The Commission will use it to see which legislation we should support and which ones we should be against.

ANGIE STABILE: I'm on the legislative committee. Usually I sit at the table up front, since I got here nice and early, no pun intended, it's a joke.

We read through the transcript from each meeting, each forum, form committees: Transportation, employment, housing, and such things like that, and we put together proposed legislation.

Then, basically, shop for legislators.

What that means is, we look for sponsors of our legislation, and then that gets changed through their legislative council and reworked so we can get it through the process.

FEMALE SPEAKER: You testify?

ANGIE STABILE: Excuse me?

FEMALE SPEAKER: You testify?

ANGIE STABILE: Yes, I do. I'm at the State House all the time.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Thank you.

BRIAN ADAE: There are a variety of sources. The Governor's Commission on Disabilities, their website, and the Veteran's organizations, which you're probably just beginning to learn about, too.

FEMALE SPEAKER: As I said to you in private, I will say it in public, my husband didn't expect to lose his leg, there was nobody for him to talk to about what was going to happen in the hospital at all. One of the reasons he has his support group, which is called Stump Talk, if a Veteran were to lose a limb, at least they could come and talk about it and get to understand what was going on, et cetera, et cetera.

And so, one thing I'd love to see this commission move out to are those hospitals so there are people available to talk to somebody like my husband while he's, when he's trying to make this decision about what he should do.

There was nobody, there's nobody out there.

Do you understand what I'm saying?

RICK COSTA: Thank you all. Any other speakers? Any other comments to be made?

MALE SPEAKER: Jim.

FEMALE SPEAKER: I have a question, I'm the quiet one here. If there's other people who want to make a difference, send a letter, or e-mail to the Governor's Commission on Disabilities?

ALYSSA GLEASON: I'll give you my information now. My number is, 462-0100. I'm at the office pretty much every day, Monday through Friday, nine to four. If you leave a voicemail, I will get back to you, I promise.

BRIAN ADAE: Does the commission still, as they formerly had, accept e-mail as well. Would there be an address or e-mail address for that?

ALYSSA GLEASON: Our address is 41 Cherrydale Court in Cranston, and the zip for that is 02920.

FEMALE SPEAKER: What's the e-mail, website, where, if you wanted to give testimony on there?

ALYSSA GLEASON: Our website is gcd.ri.gov, and that has all of our contact information on there, and the e-mail, I'll give you my e-mail. You can send your testimony to me. It's ALYSSA.GLEASON@GCD.RI.GOV.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Thank you.

JIM CARNEY: I had a question, this is Jim Carney. You had mentioned that they could look at the transcripts of these meetings, and now, does the Governor's Commission draft legislation on issues, or do they monitor legislation?

ALYSSA GLEASON: Both.

JIM CARNEY: Let's say they draft a piece of legislation, is there any way the Governor's Commission can put it on the website that we can subscribe to?

ALYSSA GLEASON: Our website has a thing called Legislative Letter that goes out every week during the legislative session, and it keeps track of all the legislation we have a particular interest in, gives you a summary, tells you the status, and on our website, it tells you how to sign up, and you get that letter every week.

JIM CARNEY: Okay. Good.

ANGIE STABILE: I used to put them together when I interned there, so it's very detailed. And back in the olden days, we used to have to mail them.

VINNY DeJESUS: I'd like to mention something to the lady in the purple blouse, I'm sorry, I forget your name. I'm going to give you a flier for it. I'm from this Statewide Independent Living Council, (SILC), and our website, there actually is a link just for those, it's basically a survey with multiple questions. Our hope is people with disabilities from around the state would take it and get together, and then we pretty much analyse the survey results and bring up the issues to the proper places. So, anyway, that's risilc.org, and I just was hoping to give you that information. I have, actually, on me, if you want. That's one of the flyers.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Thank you.

VINNY DeJESUS: Thank you.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Oh, and you guys are all on it?

VINNY DeJESUS: A few of us, yes. And if your husband is interested, we're always looking for new membership with new ideas, new brainpower. Any time.

RICK COSTA: Any other comments? 5:35, still have to hangout for 20 minutes. We'll take a break, and everybody can go back to conversing.

(BREAK)

RICK COSTA: May I have your attention, please? May I have your attention, please? We have another person that has arrived and would like to speak.

Antonio Silva, the floor is now yours.

ANTONIO SILVA: I'm from East Providence, Riverside, I went to OSO, the organization put a ramp in for me. I have MS, they also helped me put in a shower with no tub, it's really low, and a sliding door with it. And they were very professional, very, I can't say enough adjectives to express how I feel about the work and how they treated us, and so if I could recommend them to anybody, I'm going to. That's it. If you have any questions, I'll get to answer them, also. Thank you.

RICK COSTA: Thank you. Thank you very much.

RICK COSTA: Anybody else?

FEMALE SPEAKER: I actually have something to say. What did you say?

BRIAN ADAE: The Ocean State Center for Independent Living?

MALE SPEAKER: Yes.

FEMALE SPEAKER: I just wanted to say that we, it would have been very hard for us to afford to put in the handicap bathroom, one that has a sink that comes down for him, and all the handles and everything, and he was having a hard time with the tub, and we really couldn't have afforded to do that ourselves. Maybe eventually we could have, but we really were happy to have that done for us. They're a good agency.

RICK COSTA: Was there a waiting list? When you applied to do that, was there a waiting list?

MALE SPEAKER: I didn't get any indication that there was. They said we needed to do it as soon as possible because from the beginning to signing the papers and approving and all that would take about four months, so about June, it was ready to go so they were right on the ball, as far as the period.

FEMALE SPEAKER: We went through that, we called the MS Society, that's who I started with, and they gave me several agencies, and that was one I called, probably the first one I called, and I said you didn't, the ramp they put in, he's not in a wheelchair yet, we use it sometimes if we go on trips or something, he still has one, he's still walking quite a bit, they said they do have the funds to put it in and went ahead and got it put in and of course will be using it eventually. We appreciated that, too.

RICK COSTA: Thank you. Okay. Anyone else? Okay. Go back to mingling.

It's now 6:00, and the Governor's Commission on Disabilities public forum here in Bristol has now come to an end. I want to thank everybody for coming here today.

MALE SPEAKER: I want to thank you for coming here, too.

RICK COSTA: Thank you for coming and taking time out of your busy day and expressing your concerns. Be safe on your way home, and I hope that the RIDE works out for everybody that's using it today.