

Cheryl Ann Frazier: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to The ADA at 35—A Covenant of Dignity, Still Holding, as we celebrate the 35th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. I am Cheryl Ann Frazier, founder and CEO of Humanity Consideration Consultants, an ADA consulting firm where we believe you should consider humanity first.

So The ADA at 35, again, A Covenant of Dignity, Still Holding. A covenant is a binding agreement or promise establishing mutual obligations between parties that are based on trust and shared values. Dignity is a quality or state of being worth held by every human being, regardless of ability, status, or circumstance. And still holding, it means that we are resilient. We are resilient. We have resilience. There's a continuous commitment and an unfinished promise. We will not forget the impact of the ADA that has been made over the last 35 years. We also recognize the challenges it took to get there. Today's conversation will honor that history by exploring the period before the ADA, the moment of its signing and what has taken place since. We will discuss challenges and solutions, and those solutions will be rooted in lived experience, deep understanding, and visionary leadership. Our panelists will share perspectives that empower, inform, and inspire. HCC will be celebrating the 35th anniversary of the ADA the entire year. Join us as we present the first HCC ADA 35 D'Anna C. Howard Legacy Scholarship to three recipients. And throughout the year — you'll see it on our website — and you can join us as we do 30 acts of service throughout this time period. Again, thank you for joining us. Let's begin this important conversation.

I have the honor to present to you our esteemed panelists, Dr. Sue ElHessen, Vice Chair of the Public Social Services Commission of Los Angeles County. Dr. ElHessen is a disability rights advocate who has led statewide education and health initiatives for individuals with disabilities. She also served as the ADA Coordinator for the City of Santa Monica.

We have Mr. Steven Gordon, a retired Civil Rights Enforcement Coordinator for the U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Virginia. Mr. Gordon is a nationally recognized and respected ADA enforcement leader and disability rights educator.

Ms. D'Anna C. Howard, a resilient advocate with lived experience of metastatic breast cancer and employment discrimination, Ms. Howard uplifts others by sharing her personal journey of faith, family, and fierce determination. It is my honor to have her here, specifically. You'll learn later why.

Mrs. Brandy McCrary-Taylor, as Executive Director of Workforce Solutions Incorporated, Mrs. McCrary-Taylor brings deep expertise in human resources and ADA compliance to empower inclusive employment practices, providing training and compliance assessments.

Ms. Shelly Simmons, Executive Director of the Statewide Independent Living Council of Georgia, Ms. Simmons is a long-time champion for disability policy, community inclusion, and independent living; a leader indeed.

Mr. Mark Johnson, a nationally recognized disability rights pioneer, Mr. Johnson served as Chair of the ADA Legacy Project, a founding member of ADAPT, American Disabled for Accessible Public Transportation and American Disabled for Attendant

Programs Today, and he is retired as the Director of Advocacy at the Shepherd Center here in Atlanta.

Are you all ready to get started?

Let's get started. All right, so there's an opening prompt that I like to share with all of the panelists today. By the way, if you all can give them a round of applause as your reaction. I'm excited that they took time out of their busy schedule to share time with us today on a Saturday. Do you all know this is the actual July 26th, 2025, 35 years after the signing? Let the walls of exclusion come tumbling down for sure!

Mark Johnson: Amen.

Cheryl Ann: Let's get started. The Americans with Disabilities Act is a civil rights law, a promise. As we have named it for today's discussion, a covenant. In a few words, panelists, what does the ADA mean to you personally or professionally in this moment, 35 years after that historic signing? Let's start with you, Dr. Sue ElHessen.

Sue ElHessen: Thank you, thank you. Very honored to be here with my esteemed colleagues and the panelists here today. For me personally, it's the door opening. I know that when I started working at Northrop and Toyota, it was pre-ADA, and I found many challenges. And so I actually educated myself on ADA when it first came out. I went through the Windmills training, and I wanted to spread information to employers on how important it is to hire people with disabilities. I never really had a problem interviewing or going through the process for getting a job, but I found challenges once I got to the job. So that was one of the things that I kind of share my story about. When I worked for Northrop, they paid me for two hours for sitting on the john

because the bathroom was not accessible. So that was one of my challenges, is really not only being able to hire a person with disability and, in my case, I am post-polio, so it's a physical disability, but being able to make sure their work environment is accessible in order for them to be able to perform, as they say in the ADA, the 'essential functions' of the job. So that was one of my greatest challenges. Today I find it that many companies, organizations, seem to want to water it down, and I think what we as advocates and why I'm so glad you're presenting this, is to empower people with disabilities to reignite this very important civil rights act for people with disabilities to really step up and say, yes, this is important, and they have to honor this covenant that they had made back in the 1990s.

Cheryl Ann: Right. 1990s. Wow! I was born — I don't want to date myself. Thank you so much for sharing that story. But you're right; it's a covenant of dignity, and we strive to make sure it continues.

Ms. Shelly Simmons, what does the ADA mean to you personally or professionally in this moment?

It seems as if you're on mute. I'm sorry. We can come back to you in just a moment.

Shelly Simmons: So, I mean, Cheryl?

Cheryl Ann: Yes, we can hear you.

Shelly: OK, I'm sorry. Thank you so much, and thank you again for the opportunity to speak to everyone today. I'm excited about the 35th anniversary of the ADA. I, too, was quite young, um, before I even heard about the ADA. I have muscular dystrophy limb-girdle syndrome. I was diagnosed when I was 13, so — and

this was the late '70s when I was diagnosed, so I didn't know anything. Well, this is pre-ADA, and so even as I grew, I did not know a lot about the Americans with Disabilities Act. And it wasn't until I started needing resources in order for me to continue living independently that I began to learn about the ADA. Dr. Sue ElHessen actually is a mentor of mine, my first mentor. And so what the ADA means to me is empowerment. Through her leadership and her guidance, I learned how to advocate for myself, how to speak up, learn more about the Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504 all because of Dr. Sue ElHessen. So I'm grateful that it has — my relationship with her, that connection — but learning about the ADA has given me a voice to the point that I am helping to advocate on the behalf of others with disabilities. It's a continuous journey, always growing, learning, and also, again, to empower not only myself but for others as well. So it's a a great opportunity, great advancements, but we're almost having to refight again, start the fight all over again, so I'm excited to hear what everyone has to say today. Thank you.

Cheryl Ann: Thank you. Empowerment. Mr. Steven Gordon [inaudible].

Steven Gordon: Well, thank you. And Cheryl, thank you so much for this invitation to this wonderful program. The ADA for me is a recognition in law of the discrimination and the fact that people with disabilities have been marginalized. As a person with an invisible disability, I really appreciate that, and I have two family members with serious disabilities; one's passed away, but the other one is still alive, and this is from my family of origin and having a law that protects people with disabilities and that explains that disability rights are civil rights is really, um,

recognition. It's seeing me and others in my family for the fact that they need protection against discrimination. And professionally, it's been a wonderful vehicle for me, um, to support people and assist people, um, who have been wronged and faced injustice that often was not understood. And I welcome the fact that there's this statute that codifies a lot of the important values that go to address ableism.

Cheryl Ann: Thank you, Steven. Yes, so important. I'd like to move to Mrs. Brandy McCrary-Taylor. What does the ADA mean to you in this moment?

Brandy McCrary-Taylor: You know, when I think of the word 'covenant' I think of the word 'promise.' It connects. So the ADA or me is a living promise. It ensures that people with disabilities are not only protected, but, as Shelly said, empowered. So, personally, it represents my belief that equity should never be conditional. I think it's a reminder that the barriers we remove today can impact someone else's — the way someone else thrives tomorrow. So the ADA is a covenant, yes, but it's also a challenge to keep showing up, to keep listening, and to keep pushing for better in every aspect of our lives.

Cheryl Ann: Very good. Thank you so much. Yes, it's a living document. Ms. D'Anna Howard, what does the ADA mean to you in this moment?

D'Anna Howard: It means a lot to me. It lets me know I understand that I'm not the only one that has faced challenges with disability, that I have a legislation and a group of people to lean on and resources that I can reach out to when I need them as a person that lives with two disabilities. It's just comforting to

know that it's a place where, when sometimes you don't feel like you're treated as if you're worthy, that you really are.

Cheryl Ann: Very good. Thank you. Yes, we are all worthy. It's a great reminder. Thank you for sharing. Mr. Mark Johnson, what does the ADA mean to you personally or professionally in this moment? Oh, you're on mute, Mark. Mark, can you hear me? You're on mute.

Mark Johnson: Is that better?

Cheryl Ann: Yes.

[indistinct crosstalk]

Mark: First, I'm 74. And so, uh, you know, 54 years ago, so that was before there were many building codes that addressed [inaudible] so that was before any inclusion we had.

Cheryl Ann: Hey, Mark, I'm sorry to interrupt you. You're coming in a little garbled.

Mark: [inaudible] Is that better?

Cheryl Ann: Yes.

Mark: So I come from a background where there really wasn't any building codes or anti-discrimination laws, so what ADA meant to me, when I especially look at the preamble that acknowledges that people like ourselves are treated differently and in a formal way of discrimination. And all of a sudden ADA said that we acknowledge that history, uh, and it was wrong, and now you have a new tool in your toolkit to fight it.

Cheryl Ann: Very good. Mark, I want to kick off the rest of our discussion with you. You opened up by saying you're 78, so thank you for sharing that. I'm not too far behind you. Can you take us

back for a moment, though? What was life like for individuals with disabilities in the years and decades before the ADA, from the 504 sit-ins, to the Capitol Crawl to ADAPT protests? You witnessed this firsthand. What did those moments of resistance feel like? And when it was finally signed, what glimmer of hope did it offer?

Mark: That's a good question, excellent question. You know, I [inaudible] entered 1971, so that was that was the architectural paradigm of 1968. And also, I didn't get involved in the movement until 1977, so I was not part of getting the 504 and all the sections [indistinct] I think sometimes there's too much focus just on one specific section. [indistinct] I didn't see any effects of it that way. Um, you know, there was, uh, once again, [indistinct] vehicle and there were no designated parking areas for [indistinct] when you went in the bathroom.

Cheryl Ann: Mark, sorry to interrupt you. Mark, can you hear me? You're coming in — you're not coming in clear, and I don't want us to miss what you're offering because you're offering us some great information.

Mark: All right. Is that better?

Cheryl Ann: Yes.

Mark: I'm sorry. I'm in a car. So once again there, you know, there was no — people with disability tried to be normal. They didn't want to embrace the identity of a disabled person, so you can only imagine what that was like, meaning you didn't identify as a disabled person if there weren't any laws that said it was that it was illegal to discriminate. There were no, um, like I said, building codes that addressed accessibility. So there was very little

acknowledgment that you exist. And when 504 came along, you all of a sudden realized not only do you exist, but you have rights.

Cheryl Ann: Mark, I'm going to move to the next question, but I also want to give our listeners a recap. Mark was saying that he wasn't involved in the movement during the 504 sit-ins. He started in in 1977. And I know he would also want to share information about the Capitol Crawl, which happened just a few months before the signing of the ADA, where protest was taking place, and people were saying, you know, enough is enough, we need access. And, Mark, if we if we don't hear you as clearly as we would like to today, I definitely would like to do a one-on-one with you. You are history of the ADA to us, and we'd like to hear from you. I'm not sure if you can make any adjustments to your speaking apparatus at this time.

Mark: Well, you know, obviously, uh, some of us were in Denver, Colorado, and that's when we created ADAPT. A lot of people misunderstand ADAPT. It's not organization [indistinct] and people who wanted to get on busses. So we obviously got involved in ADA to make sure [indistinct]. So that's my offering. But '77, we created [indistinct] Charlotte, North Carolina, got married in '81, created ADAPT in '83. And so by the time things came along, um, you know, 504 was [indistinct] time, and when Reagan got elected, they went from a national mandate to local option. So it's just like now, you know, we fought hard to get what we got. We have to fight harder to keep what we have.

Cheryl Ann: You're absolutely correct. Thank you so much for sharing. And, um, Mark has a lot to offer us, and I'll be happy to showcase everything that he has to offer at a later time about

before the ADA being signed, when it was signed, and after it was signed. I will move on to D'Anna Howard. Hi, D'Anna. I have a question for you. And any of the other panelists as we go around, we'd love to hear from you as well. D'Anna, thank you for agreeing to share your personal story as an individual with disabilities and one who has experience with disability discrimination in the workplace. How has your lived experience shaped your resilience and your hope? And in moments of challenge, teach us what do you do to keep moving forward.

D'Anna Howard: Hi everyone, I'm D'Anna Howard, thank you so much for allowing me to speak with you all today. At the age of 23, I was diagnosed with stage 3A breast cancer, months after my mother had just passed from it, years after my grandmother had passed. So at that young age, thinking that you're invincible, to get a diagnosis like that is very hard hitting. Now, moving forward to today where I'm much older [chuckles] I live with not one disability, but two. I'm partially blind. So it's hard to deal with especially when you don't know your rights, when you don't know if it's — you don't realize it's other people going through what you're going through. You feel isolated. You feel like it's only you. You feel like woe is me. So, um, they're starting there. Also, earlier this year, I found out that the sickness has spread. And under the advisement of my Emory care team in midtown Atlanta, directed by Ethan Tolbert, I was advised that I needed to do radiation. I was employed with the company that I had moved up quickly with. I was a supervisor, and I advised them that I needed accommodation so that I could go and do radiation. As I was doing that, you know, I got granted the accommodations, and when I came back I had a conversation with HR that led me to believe that my sickness was hindering the business, which I

knew it wasn't, because I had moved up so quickly and I had letters of recommendation also. And it hurts your feelings. It makes you feel as if they're pushing you away. I didn't know at that time that it was discrimination. I called my lovely Aunty Cheryl Ann, which is an amazing advocate for the ADA, and she let me know that, in fact, I had been discriminated against, and so she set me off on a journey to advocate for myself and educated me fully on ADA. And since then, I have been amazed and astonished and just felt basically in a group of people that I know I'm protected with under a legislation that protects me. It hurts my heart to know that a lot of people are discriminated against that don't know about the ADA, that don't know about their rights. They don't know that you do have the right to be treated and protected, treated right and protected. So, you know, I take solace in that. I take solace in knowing that I'm not alone. Education is key. I want people to learn about the ADA. I want people to learn about their rights because I never want them to feel the way I felt for many years, especially this year, going through discrimination on the job, having someone talk to you and dismiss you when you put in time, effort. When it happened, I wanted to walk away. This was a job that I liked. This was a job that fed my family. I just thought it was over, like, OK, well, I'll just find another job. But I didn't understand that I needed to stand up for myself. I needed to advocate for myself. I needed my kids to see that you're not, you know, if they develop any type of disability, that they will be protected, that there's people like my Aunt Ann, my Aunt Cheryl Ann and myself that can advocate and show them the way to go and a panel of beautiful people that can also reach out to the help them. Moving forward in life is my goal, protecting myself, my children, talking with other people, letting them know about breast

cancer, blindness. I've been doing advocating for early screenings, early screenings, making sure that you speak up, you know, for yourself if you feel like you're being discriminated in any setting. If it's your child, your parent, yourself, just advocate for yourself and learn about the ADA because it's a wonderful thing. And if you're in here, you see a lot of wonderful people that can help you along the way with this.

Cheryl Ann: Thank you so much, D'Anna, and I am very grateful to have you to share this platform with me today. And thank you for being you and for inspiring me and others around you. So thank you for sharing your story.

D'Anna: Thank you.

Cheryl Ann: Mr. Gordon and Dr. ElHessen, the ADA is, at its heart, about people and access. There's no doubt about that. When we're serving humanity, emotional intelligence is essential. From self-awareness to cultural competencies to empathy and social awareness, how can emotional intelligence help us better support individuals with disabilities, whether it's in policy, in services, or in everyday interactions? Steve, can you start us off with that? And Dr. ElHessen, can you follow up after Steve so we can hear more please?

Steven: Yeah, sure. So one of the things I have found working in this disability rights space is that there's different kinds of barriers. There's architectural barriers. People are pretty familiar with those. When you go to the grocery store and you see the accessible parking spaces. There's communication barriers. And you can see here this particular program, um, has an ASL interpreter which addresses communication barriers. And then there's the toughest kind of barriers, which are attitudinal barriers.

Um, and these barriers often come about because people don't understand and they don't have the openness to understanding the challenges that people with disabilities face, and they often dismiss those challenges. That can be very troubling. And one of the things that I often try to do is help to increase people's cultural competency and, even more importantly, their cultural humility, um, because those are areas that are really important. And once I see cultural competency and cultural humility go up, I often see attitudinal barriers and implicit biases going down. Um, and, um, it's, you know, important for people to have compassion and understanding when someone says, "I have a disability." And I often help people coach them to say, you know, instead of your first reaction to what you hear, take a moment, take a deep breath, listen to what the person is saying because there's probably more to it than what you initially know, especially if you don't have lived experience that provides you with the compassion and empathy for the person. And there's lots of different kinds of disabilities, and they manifest themselves in a lot of different settings, so I think it's really important, for people to understand that, and to understand that, you know, if you know, one person with autism, you know one person with autism. These things can play out in a lot of different ways.

Cheryl Ann: That's right. Thank you so much for sharing. That's such important information. Emotional intelligence is necessary, and I'm glad that you were able to share with us how it plays out, um, through all sectors of life. So thank you. Dr. Sue?

Sue: Yes, well, I really believe, um, for people with disabilities, that emotional intelligence is critical because, first of all, it's understanding yourself. And once you understand yourself, you're

much be able — be able to communicate your abilities, and that's the focus, I think mostly in working with employers or even identifying what you need in an environment, whether it's a sports activity or it's something that you're doing at work because, um, emotional intelligence is often used as a buzzword, but really it's a very powerful tool, as you mentioned. And by knowing yourself and you communicate that with others, you're much better able to say when you are being discriminated against, why and how. It's no longer just a feeling that you're saying, feeling attacked or you're feeling, um, um, put aside, you're not worthy, but you're more able to articulate why. And that's where your power comes from. When you talk about empowerment is understanding your own why and being able to apply it in every, every area of your life. For me personally, I've learned, um, one of the key areas most recently, I should say, is I was so shocked that I dealt with ableism on a school board. So here are people who are supposed to be accepting, understanding of, quote unquote, “our students with disabilities,” and I was blatantly discriminated against time and time again when they refused to want to acknowledge my role as either. You know, we serve different titles— president, vice president, or clerk, and they intentionally wanted to pass me over every single time. Well, I've been on the board for nine years, so I served in each of those roles, so it wasn't that I was incompetent to serve those roles; it was blatant ableism. They did not want me to serve in those roles. And at first I felt like, I can't believe in, you know, 2024, 2023 that I'm dealing with this again, but it was that reality that it never goes away, and that's where the empowerment comes in, is that you have to continually know and advocate for yourself. And I did. And no matter how many times they knocked me down publicly on the diocese, I met them

equally on that challenge and called them out as being ableist, and they were very angry at that many times before, but I stayed. They didn't bully me out. I completed my term, and, um, I left with dignity, even though I didn't serve any of those titles. And to me, that's empowerment. But it's also emotional intelligence in that I knew myself and I didn't achieve what I achieved in my life, being, uh, listening to bullies or going down to a mindset that was so limiting. That's what I wanted to say.

Cheryl Ann: Yes, yes. Thank you so much, Dr. Sue and Steve. This is great. I mentioned during some of our other interactions that Humanity Consideration Consultants, we make it a point to include emotional intelligence information in all of our training and any other engagement that we have. When we're consulting for government entities, we put emotional intelligence as a part of it because it's necessary. The good thing that Daniel Goldman says about emotional intelligence is that it can be taught at any age. So for those of us who are on the line, maybe you've never heard of the term or you want to know more about it, know that it's not too late, that we can learn until as long as we have breath in our body, that we can learn about emotional intelligence. So thank you so much to you both for sharing.

Mrs. McCrary-Taylor, Brandy?

Brandy: Yes, ma'am. Mhm.

Cheryl Ann: Let's talk about employment. You're our HR expert on this team. As someone who navigates HR and ADA every day, how can employers and ADA coordinators improve the way they connect with individuals with disabilities, whether they have visible disabilities, non-visible, chronic, or episodic?

Brandy: Great question, Cheryl. I want to preface this by saying I am not a lawyer, nor do I play one on TV, but I love policy and I love compliance. I think within the ADA, ADA education and compliance must be integrated across every single level of an organization; this is from the C-suite executives to middle management — which is where am right now — to frontline staff and even externally with external stakeholders. I think the commitment should begin during the application process. I think during the recruitment process it should be reinforced during onboarding, and I think it should continue throughout the employee's lifecycle with that company. I think if you have a proactive organization-wide approach, it will help to improve your culture. It'll include — it'll have inclusion, legal compliance and a sustained support for individuals with disabilities. So I definitely think that it has to be deeply — to deeply embed the ADA in the culture, everyone has to be educated, not just the employee, not just middle management, not just the C-suite; everyone has to have equal access to the information about the ADA.

Cheryl Ann: Very good. Somebody's going to hire you to come in and talk to them about HR and ADA.

[chuckling]

Thank you so much for your offering.

Brandy: I'm passionate about it. Thank you.

Cheryl Ann: We can feel that. Thank you so much for sharing. And just so you all know, we do have an attorney on the panel, Mr. Steven Gordon. Just in case we need one, we have an attorney on the panel. So thank you so much for your offering. HR air is extremely important. And you're right— it's from the first

engagement to the last engagement that we will need to educate about the ADA.

Sue: I just want to mention one important thing—

Cheryl Ann: Please.

Sue: —especially for our individuals with hidden disabilities.

Cheryl Ann: Yes, Dr. Sue.

Sue: When I used to counsel students because I was a career counselor and worked at universities in the colleges, I talked about disclose your disability.

Cheryl Ann: Mhm.

Sue: And for people who have a hidden disability, I often tell them know what the job's about, and then when to disclose is really important, especially for hidden disabilities. So understanding what it is, I'll give you an example. I had a student who had seasonal depression. She was an older student and she said, "I don't know when to disclose it." It was a position for recreational director, or activities director. And she wants to — it would require a certain amount of time indoors, and that was a factor for her. It was that she needed to have the lamp, a special light to be indoors in order to accommodate for her disability. So she brought it up during the second interview. And I think that's important to understand — I just wanted to bring that up — is when to disclose a hidden disability and how you can empower yourself in when to bring it up and knowing what the job's about and how to make it, um, how to make it more of a positive because focusing on your abilities and in order to function in that job, this would be really a great support. So anytime you're asking for an accommodation,

always flip it back to it's a strength. I just wanted to add that. Thank you.

Cheryl Ann: Yes. And it not only assist the individual with the disability, it also assists the company, the organization, so we keep that in mind. Brandy, did you have any follow up? Or anyone else on the panel, did you all have any follow up to that comment?

D'Anna: I did. This is D'Anna. I just wanted to say it's hard sometimes. Like, I was, um, before I knew about the ADA, and I would hide my disability and the limitations that I had because I felt as if I wouldn't be able to provide a life for me and my family because I felt as if I would be discriminated against even before I knew about the ADA. So I — excuse me — I feel like if they have compassion and make people feel as if we all can contribute something to the workplace, that people won't feel that way. They won't feel as if they have to hide their disability because they'll know what actions to take in order to let the employer know if they need accommodations or not.

Cheryl Ann: Very good. Thank you for that follow up. Brandy, you had something?

Brandy: Well, just the employees that I work with at the company that I'm with right now,

I just make it a safe space. They, for whatever reason, they will disclose to me what disability they're dealing with, and I let them know with me, it's a safe space; I'm not going to give this information to anyone else unless you give me permission to. So I think disclosure is a very personal thing — I also have an invisible disability — and it's a choice that that individual needs to make on their own. I don't—I don't tell someone, you need to tell everyone. I don't tell them not to. I say you need to think about it, do some

research, and then you make that decision on your own. Don't let anyone else tell you that you have to or need to disclose your disability.

Cheryl Ann: Very good follow up. Thank you, Brandy. Shelly, did you have comments as well?

Shelly: Yes. This is Shelly. And in regards to the employment, I know that when I was interviewing, um, way back in the day that as Dr. Sue mentioned, I would include that in my responses, how I work, what I'm capable of doing so that they, of course, can ask the question, "Well, how would you do this with your job with a disability?" I would just incorporate it in my responses— this is how I'm able to do this, this and this and this, to let them know that I've already thought about the position and something that I'm already doing. And with these slight modifications, that I may need accommodations, I have no problem doing the job. So I think that that self-awareness, that emotional intelligence comes into play because you're confident in your ability, and then you're able to relate that during a job interviewing process.

Cheryl Ann: Very good, Shelly. Thank you for your input on that; very valuable. I think we have made the case that HR professionals and C-suite or commissioners or executive directors, and the middle management need to be trained thoroughly on the Americans with Disabilities Act and the rights of others, which may even include them. We talk a lot about — today, we've been talking a lot about non-visible disabilities. I just want to remind everybody that in the legislation, we have something called 'predictable assessments,' and a lot of times people with predictable assessments that are listed don't even know that they may be covered under the ADA. In fact, it's

predicted that there will be. Individuals who have cancer, or who live with diabetes, or who have mental disabilities like depression and bipolar and schizophrenia, some people are not aware that they also are covered by the ADA, and those who may have bodily system issues. So it's bigger than what people think. And so as much as I love the document, the Americans with Disabilities Act, I know we need to push forward with putting it in front of as many people as possible. I always say just walk down the street talking about ADA wherever you go. Everybody needs to know about it. [chuckles] So thank you all for your input. Mark, I see that you're there. Did you have a comment at this time?

Mark: I just think the context everybody got individually, you have to go to your own self-assessment if you want to call it that. You have decide that you're going to be part of the solution.

Cheryl Ann: Assessment is important.

Mark: Well, if [indistinct] people do it for you, and I think our history shows a lot them [indistinct] haven't always been good things.

Cheryl Ann: That's right.

Mark: So it's [inaudible] schools or a [indistinct] There's a long history of, you know, out of sight, out of mind psychology. And once again [indistinct] voluntarily, right?

Cheryl Ann: Right. Thank you, Mark. For some reason, you're still coming in choppy for us, but I want to give people some feedback. Mark talked about ensuring a self-assessment, knowing yourself, knowing what you can do, knowing what your needs are and being able to articulate those, so I appreciate his input as

well. And I see that Steve wants to weigh in, too. Steve, tell us, what do you have?

Steven: Yeah, I wanted to follow up on your point about training and how important that is. It's obviously important for HR. It's also really important for the people who interact with the public, where the organization has the rubber meeting the road. And I saw a huge difference in the organizations that had people who were trained to know what they were supposed to do when their organization was interacting with a member of the public who had a disability versus those that did not. So it's an area where a lot of people don't understand what they're supposed to do, the people — sometimes people do if they have a family member who has a particular disability, but they often don't. And the way to get that better understanding is with high-quality training.

Cheryl Ann: Very good, Steven. I know that you also provide that high-quality training, so thank you. I do believe that training is the backbone of any organization.

Sue: And I want — I'm sorry, I wanted to add one thing.

Cheryl Ann: That's OK. Dr. Sue, go ahead.

Sue: I couldn't—I couldn't find the raise my hand option in my — so excuse me for chiming in, but I wanted — I want to add something very important, especially when you talk about training, and it's really being able to train, um, in our next generation. And I think this is where — I know Shelly and I have talked about this a great deal — is not only being able to have our next generation understand the ADA. Because as we have our high school students graduating and going into college, their understanding are going to be critical in being able to look at their fellow classmates or future individuals who are coming into

organizations, coming into social programs and understanding a disability and understanding the ADA. And I think today, it's fallen off the chart. And I think, um, for training, I'd love to see — and I'm, I'm a strong advocate and I've been pushing this at our local LA County Department of Education — is having ADA training for our teachers in special ed and also providing it for parents of students with disabilities so they know how to advocate for their students and they know how to go about supporting their students and getting accommodations in the classroom.

Cheryl Ann: That's right.

Sue: And so this this is like supporting the ADA moving forward because we stand on the shoulders of those who support, who led the — who led the challenge, you know. And now we are those individuals who are wanting to continue that challenge forward. And I think it's our responsibility, everyone here on this panel and even those listening, to make sure that our youth know the importance of this second-largest civil rights act passed for people with disabilities. I think it's fallen short, off the charts because of other programs. I'm not saying that they're not important, whether it's LGBTQ, whether it's other groups that have kind of dominated the political arena, and I often say there are many people with disabilities who are also LGBTQ, and so I'm saying we cannot exclude this population in moving forward, and I feel, um, that's what's happening. And we need to embrace that more, embrace our population, the disabled population, and this law helps us do that, and so that's why I wanted to bring up the training and education. That's empowerment when we have our next generation move forward in this area.

Cheryl Ann: Thank you for that, Dr. Sue. And yes, we have been passed the baton. I think it's important that we go back to the fact that we're all members of humanity, and so we encourage everyone to fight for their rights; 'fight' being a word that you can use interchangeably with others. But to fight for our rights, we all deserve that. And as members of humanity, no matter what group we're associated with, there's one group that we all are in, and that is a group that's called humanity. Also, thank you for mentioning those educators who work in exceptional services. We really appreciate the work that they do. And as part of our 35 acts of service, we will be giving back to them because of the work that they do in our school systems. Um, Steven, please go ahead.

Steven: Yeah. And in terms of the populations of professionals that it would be helpful to train, one of the things that I have found is that there's a lot of professionals who do work that is adjacent to people with disabilities, whether it's school teachers or doctors or social workers. And many of them don't get ADA training as a part of their professional training that they get in graduate school, so it's really important for people. And, you know, a teacher who gets her teacher certification doesn't necessarily get ADA training. A nurse, you know, to become an RN, you don't need ADA training. And it's really important in those spaces for people to get it. And there's a wide variety of issues that come up in those spaces, whether it's someone arriving in an emergency room, you know, in the middle of the night who's deaf, or it's a student who has a disability, who needs to be properly trained in how to evacuate a school building when there's an emergency, whether it's an active shooter drill or a fire drill or any other kind of drill. And a lot of the professionals who interact with people with

disabilities really would benefit from having the kind of training that doctor Sue is talking about.

Cheryl Ann: Very good, very good. And yes, qualified medical and mental health professionals, oh, wow, we need training in that area. We're sending in accommodation requests, and sometimes they don't know which way to go with it. So I appreciate you bringing them up and the educators. We're going to move on. Shelly, if you could join us, I wanted to ask a question of you, please. As executive director of the Statewide Independent Living Council of Georgia, are we closer to fully realizing the promise of community integration and independent living since the ADA and the Olmstead decision, and what current barriers should we be paying attention to, especially if we want to be better allies and advocates? I know that's a tough one.

Shelly: That's a tough one, yeah. And this is Shelly. As the director of the SILC, or Statewide Independent Living Council, I have seen strides made slow, but strides. I think that it is unfortunate that there still is such a fight, an everyday fight, for this equity that we're advocating for. Um, I think that, yes, we're slowly transitioning in regards to the Olmstead decision, individuals out of nursing homes and other facilities; that is still in challenge. And mainly because of other resources that are lacking within our community in regards to housing, making sure that we have enough qualified and well-compensated caregivers for transitioning. Transportation, everything is so interwoven in how they intersect when it comes to providing services. And if we can't find or have enough affordable, accessible housing in relationship to transportation that will allow for individuals to live independent lives, being involved in their community, we still have a long way

to go, especially if you move outside of the area of Atlanta and probably most large metropolis, it can be challenging. Things are lacking. So when you have lack, progress is very slow and can be stagnant at sometimes. So as a director, it's tedious work. And it can be very frustrating because I think that we can be so much further than where we are, and to have the reason with people to help them understand that, you know, we're looking at even changing the narrative, you know, we don't want to be the doom and gloom all the time, but anyone can become a part of our population at any moment.

Cheryl Ann: That is correct.

Shelly: And so trying to convey is like, not only do these laws and things that we're advocating for benefit us, but it benefits everyone. And like you said, it's a humanity issue. And so the more people that we can get engaged and let them see that perspective, hopefully we can make some change. But small strides, I think that they are slow and that we need to be more progressive. And I think the louder that we start to speak, you know, and took radical movement for things to happen, I think we became lax or became complacent in thinking that we've done enough, but the fight continues. And I think now we're at a point where we have to get even louder, once again.

Cheryl Ann: Very good. Thank you so much for sharing that, Shelly. Yes, it continues, right, the protests. We may not be in the street every day protesting, but there are other ways that we can ensure that our voices are heard. I have to make an announcement that I really didn't want to make. But guess what? We only have about 20 minutes left. I know we should have had this panel for three hours. So there are a couple of things that we

must touch on as we move forward, so I'm going to give it to Steve for just a second. Steve, if you could, um, do this case testament, or information, in two minutes, that would be great. Let's talk about emergency preparedness and disaster response. It must be a priority, not an afterthought, as we're serving individuals with disabilities. Because when disability inclusion comes in, that means everybody needs to be included in these preparations. We have attendees from state and local governments, private businesses, HR who are on the line and caregivers. Can you please tell us the importance of emergency preparedness? And I wouldn't mind if you threw in information about the Title II toolkit, where there is a whole scope in there and a script on how to address this. Can you help us out, Steve?

Steven: Sure, and this is a really important area, and preparedness is an individualized sort of thing. You have people with different kinds of disabilities and, much like in a school, if you have an individual education plan for people with disabilities, it's really important to have an individualized plan for how you're going to evacuate people with disabilities and what you're going to do if there's an emergency, and there's are a lot of different types of disability issues that come up. Obviously, people with mobility issues are going to need to have a plan in place for how you're going to get them out of the building if you need to. And there's a lot of different kinds of disasters or emergencies that can happen, everything from an active shooter drill to tornadoes to hurricanes, earthquakes, and it's really important that you plan ahead. But you need it for other types of disabilities as well, and simply putting all the people with disabilities in one area of a building, and that is not full evacuation. That's not like giving equal access. So, you know, you might have someone who's deaf;

you're going to need to have a plan of how you provide information to them about the emergency. You might have someone who gets overstimulated by all the bells and the lights. Sometimes people with autism have that issue, and you need to have a plan in place for what are you going to do when all of a sudden all the bells and the lights start going off. Do you have headphones? Do you have a way of addressing those issues? You might have people who have anxiety disorders that need special assistance in getting out of a building. And this is really important to have a full level of understanding and to plan ahead. This is not something that you do the day of the emergency. It's something that's important to have in place because when the emergency is going on, your attention is going to be so divided among all the other needs that are happening in the building that you need to have something in place. You need to practice it ahead of time, as well. Just like you practice a fire drill ahead of time, you need to practice how you're going to evacuate people with disabilities, you know, from the building. And there are materials out there. FEMA and the Department of Justice have put out materials. And I think, Cheryl, you have collected some of those materials to put them on a handout for this as well, and they are really good starting point if your organization. I talked about schools, but it applies for a nursing facility. It applies for a hospital. It applies for an employer who, you know, works in a building. All of them need to have it. I remember during Superstorm Sandy, they needed to evacuate hospitals in New Jersey and, you know, so it's really important that part of the evacuation plan includes what do we do with people with disabilities.

Cheryl Ann: Very good. Thank you so much for your input. Yes, we have posted ADA resources. There's a link in the chat, and we

encourage you all to go there. It is a free resource. It's just a list of everything you might need. Even if you're standing up an ADA office or you just want to know more information about caregiving, there is a resource page at HCC, and that link is in the chat. Thank you for the information, Steve. It's very important that we know about emergency preparedness. It's not just an afterthought. It needs to be talked about now, in the beginning. Have a plan and know who needs to execute it, and everybody should be informed, not just the people who are responsible for evacuating the building. Everybody needs to be informed and trained. And guess what? Over and over again, one time is not the charm. This is something that needs to always be at the forefront of your training. You all, we're down to 13 minutes, and there is one thing we must cover, and I know you all are going to have a lot of input, an input that's valuable and people need to hear.

Sue: I just want to mention one thing about emergency preparedness.

Cheryl Ann: This is Sue mentioning something about emergency preparedness. Go ahead, Sue.

Sue: So there's a packet out there by Vance Taylor. He's government's for the state of California on functional emergency necessities, and it's basically starting your own advisory committee in regards to emergency preparedness, and really starting with your local cities.

Cheryl Ann: Yes.

Sue: And so I just wanted to mention it and put it out there, and I'll share the information with you, Cheryl, so you can put it out for the community to know about because that's where it starts, at

the community level and so we're prepared, whether knowing where your neighbor who has a disability. You know, we had the great fires here in LA, and unfortunately, most of the deaths were those people with disabilities.

Cheryl Ann: Thank you so much for that. Thank you for sharing.

Mark: Hey Cheryl.

Cheryl Ann: Yes, Mark.

Mark: Just quickly too, I think, you know, Shelly — Shelly hit on it, but you know, when you do these things right, you know, inclusive-wise, everybody benefits. So I think Shelly hit on that. The second thing was, you know, once you do your self-assessment, you start identifying as a disabled person, it's important just to show up. When you go to a city council meeting or you hear about a hearing about emergency preparedness or you hear about an expansion of transportation, you know, if you don't show up, nobody knows you exist.

Cheryl Ann: That's right.

Mark: Your story and your issues is, I think, it's a process of self-assessment, you know, starting to identify as a disabled person, showing up, telling your story and be part of the solution.

Cheryl Ann: That's very good, Mark, because we do have a question that came in to us about what to do. What can we do? And you just hit it on the head. We need to show up in those meetings that are in the community, and we need to have our voices ready and our information handy to let them know what we need to do to advance disability rights. Thank you so much, because disability rights are human rights, right? So thank you.

Mark: Uh, I think the, uh, you know, the person that was asking the question was, you know, look at what Department of Energy is trying to do with guidelines for 504.

Cheryl Ann: Right.

Mark: And they got like 20,000 comments, and it was a very short comment period. So now they've delayed the final rule because legally they have to go through the Congress.

Cheryl Ann: That's right.

Mark: So I think people showed up.

Cheryl Ann: Yes they did, and we are grateful for it. And you're leading us right in to our closing comment section. This is going to be a little uncomfortable, you all, but let's get ready. Put on your seat belt. Over the past few months, we've witnessed a series of developments that are deeply concerning to the disability community. We had the Texas versus Becerra case, that's now Texas versus Kennedy, that challenged the constitutionality of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. And although the 17 states that brought this lawsuit are pushing back on the constitutionality prompt, it's still in existence.

Secondly, on July 4th a federal law was signed that imposes drastic cuts to Medicaid, TANF, and other social safety net programs, disproportionately impacting individuals with disabilities and their families. You will find links to these items in your chat area. Then came July 11th. The Department of Labor withdrew the proposed rule to end subminimum wages under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act. And just days ago, two days as a matter of fact, on July 24th, an executive order on civil commitment was issued, raising serious concerns about the

potential rollback of individual autonomy and rights for people with disabilities. Again, the links to these actions are in the chat for those who would like to learn more.

But to our esteemed panelists, we only have you for another not even ten minutes, you all. We have another eight minutes. What is going on? People are rightfully feeling fearful, frustrated, and dismayed and yet we've named this roundtable discussion A Covenant of Dignity, Still Holding. We're still holding, and that's the truth we hold dear. Still we rise. But how do we do that? How do we rise in the moment? What concrete solutions and strategies and points of hope do we have to offer our audience? And I'm going to start with you, Steve. What is going on? Because some of these things are legally binding and some are being pushed that way. Help us out, attorney on the team, to start this.

Steven: So it's fairly complicated, but it's the whole concept that we take a few steps forward and then sometimes we take some steps back. And, um, one of the things that I would like to remind people is that advocacy got us the ADA, and that advocacy can't stop. It needs to continue. And advocacy has caused some of the sharper edges to be, um, less sharp in what's going on right now. And for people who are concerned about what's going on, it's a time, you know, for speaking out and for finding ways to let, um, both your elected representatives, but also people in government know because sometimes the people who are moving in these directions don't understand how this impacts people with disabilities. So it's really important to speak up. And I know that there are places that people can go, um, and organizations, for example, the Bazelon Center issued a press release about the civil commitment executive order, and they have a great, very

dynamic website. DREDF is another, uh, wonderful organization. It's a disability rights organization, and they joined the Bazelon Center press release. The Arc of the United States, the National Association of the Deaf, these are all organizations that have been around for many years, much longer than the ADA. And it's important to know that you can go there and let them know what your concerns are, and they can also probably help you figure out how to channel your energy in a productive way. So I do highly recommend, if you have a disability, look for the organizations that represent your type of disability. And there are some, like Bazelon, even though their focus is mental health issues, they do a lot of things that are across the board. Um, a lot of the Centers for Independent Living also do a lot of advocacy work. So I'm a big fan of people getting involved and speaking up. There's nothing like hearing a person with a disability talk about their lived experience to convince people that they need to stop something or stop discriminating, and I think that having those voices lifted and heard right now is essential.

Cheryl Ann: Thank you, Steve. Thank you so much for turning all of what I just said around. We have to be optimists, right? And it didn't start with a just a light knock on the door. The ADA came because of a demand, a demand from the people. And because people before us did it, we can do it too, so we shouldn't be discouraged. We should be encouraged, not discouraged, but encouraged to continue on this journey because disability rights are human rights.

I have a couple of things I wanted to say as we close out this time. We have so much more that we could share, and I hope that all of you all will agree to be a part of our one-on-one interview

series where we talk about more issues, and we're going to do some videos, and we're going to have it on our website, Humanity Consideration Consultants, so we can further this conversation.

Also, I wanted to share that Ms. Kristen Tracy is, I hope, still on the line with us. She's an upcoming author. She's going to be featured in our one-on-one interviews as she shares her story as an individual with a disability. And then we have a one-on-one that's scheduled with D'Anna C. Howard, my niece, and we're going to talk about her story further. I think that it's impactful and necessary. And Brandy and I have already scheduled something where we're going to do a one-on-one interview because we need to talk about HR, right? HR, HR, HR, putting the human back into human resources!

I want to remind everybody that there is a scholarship opportunity on our website. We did put that link in the chat earlier. We will repost it. Also 35 Acts of Service, please join us in our efforts to continue to celebrate the Americans with Disabilities Act, the most comprehensive disability act that we have before us. We will continue to march forward in all ways to ensure that the ADA stands firm. Let's talk about it, though. There was an activist that said the ADA is the floor, not the ceiling, meaning that it is a foundation for us to build upon. That's how I hear it, and that it was something that was laid. It's there, but it's not the end. We have to continue to build upon this wonderful document and put the word out that we deserve rights. We deserve equal access. This was a demand per the mother of disability rights, Judith Heumann. This started with the demand, and so we will continue to demand that we move forward and that we have access to our rights. We will consider humanity.

It has been my honor, a pleasure, and I am humbled that these esteemed panelists, that these panelists joined us today. This is great. This is Humanity Consideration Consultants' first virtual celebration of the ADA anniversary. We had in-person last year. And I just want to thank each of you all again for taking time out of your schedule to join us. We have one minute. One word from each of you. [crosstalk] Everybody, yes, if you could give everybody one word as we part to encourage them, what would that one word be after Shelly says what she needs to say?

Shelly: Well, I'll give my one word first, well, maybe a couple— Be encouraged. I think that's always important. We have to remember to know that the fight continues. Be OK with it. Take care of yourself because it can be mentally draining. But, um, so yeah, be encouraged. But what I want to do is thank Cheryl and HCC, The Humanity Consideration for putting this together, bringing all of us together to educate some, remind others of the work, the history, and what needs to be done. So thank you. And again, I, too, thank everyone for taking time out of your day to join us.

Cheryl Ann: Thank you, Shelly, and thank you for being a part of our steering committee.

Shelly: Absolutely.

Cheryl Ann: All right, one word. Mark, what's your word?

Mark: Power. Own your power. We're so afraid of ourself and the power of our story, and yet we are the experts. So I'd say power.

Cheryl Ann: Great, great! Dr. Sue, what's your word?

Sue: Spirit. We mustn't forget that the ADA has not only the technical aspects, but the spirit of the ADA— inclusion, equity.

And many times we get — not that we forget about it, but we need to emphasize it more, the spirit.

Cheryl Ann: Thank you, thank you. Brandy, what's your word?

Brandy: Refuse to let dignity be optional.

Cheryl Ann: Mmm.

Brandy: That's my word.

Cheryl Ann: Oh, I like it. We'll have to dig deep into that during our interview.

Brandy: OK.

Cheryl Ann: Steve Gordon, what is your word?

Steven: It's a concept. It recognizes that you have a lot more power than you might think.

Cheryl Ann: Thank you, thank you. D'Anna Howard? Excuse me, D'Anna. Mark Johnson, what's your word? Did you already say it, Mark?

Mark: I already said it, but—

Cheryl Ann: Power, right?

Mark: Yes, ma'am.

Cheryl Ann: OK. I'm getting older, I forgot. [laughs] D'Anna, you have the last panelist's word. My wonderful niece, what's your word?

D'Anna: My word would be perseverance. Come, overcome, know that you can overcome. Stand up for yourself. Persevere over all obstacles. If you let go of the fear, the struggle lessens. So persevere is my word.

Cheryl Ann: Very good. Thank you so much. I want to thank everybody in the comments. Thank you all so much for being here, Luanne and Mandy and Maggie, thank you all so much, our wonderful ASL interpreters. And I would not be here if it was not for Amy. Amy, thank you so much for the work that you have done for Humanity Consideration Consultants and the wonderful things that you continue to do. If you all haven't checked out our website, please do so. Amy is the architect of that website, and she keeps pouring into it. I'm very grateful to have her. Just one last thing, you all, and I promise — I know we're overtime — the State ADA Coordinator's Office has an *ADA Informer*. *The ADA Informer* is a quarterly newsletter. Um, that team is led by Stacey Valrie Peace. The team members are Barbara Tucker and Lisa Williams. And we are so happy to have them as supporters of Humanity Consideration Consultants. They did feature the scholarship as well as this roundtable discussion in their latest *ADA Informer*. So we're very appreciative to them. And there is a link in the chat regarding that. Kristen, you are welcome for the shout out. Thank you to Angela Bauer. She's the director for Disability Affairs over at the City of Atlanta. Happy National Disability Independence Day. Thank you, Angie. Emily, Mrs. Emily, thank you so much. Thank you, Mary Morda. Thank you so much for being here. Faye Henderson, Mrs. Henderson, thank you so much, Marilyn, thank you so much. Marilyn is with LATN, and this is wonderful. She was with us last year, too. Natalie, thank you so much. I just wanted to give a shout out to everyone who is making comments in the section. Tell everybody about Humanity Consideration Consultants, but more importantly, tell everybody about the Americans with Disabilities Act. It is here to stay. Be safe, be kind,

and keep talking about the Americans with Disabilities Act. Thank you all for your service today. Thank you to the panelists.