



Disability
Rights
Oregon

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Oregonians with disabilities file lawsuit for safety in the streets and equal access to the sidewalks

Portland, Oregon—Eight Oregonians with disabilities filed suit today in federal court, demanding that the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) take swift action to fix curb ramps around the state. Currently, people using wheelchairs are forced to navigate their chairs in traffic on busy highways because of lack of adequate curb ramps. Blind people can only guess where and when it is safe to cross the street. The Association for Oregon Centers of Independent Living (AOCIL), along with the eight individuals, have joined together to bring the suit. AOCIL represents seven communities of people with disabilities around Oregon.

For decades, ODOT has done little to make the roads safe and accessible to people with disabilities despite a legal obligation to make steady progress. ODOT has dedicated only a fraction of a percent of its multi-billion dollar budget to making roads safe and accessible to people with disabilities. Twenty years after the passage of the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act, ODOT determined that more than 75% of the needed curb ramps on Oregon state roads were missing or in poor condition. Despite that finding, ODOT's current rate of replacement will require people with disabilities to wait several decades more for safe and accessible crosswalks.

Oregonians with disabilities continue to be barred from the most important streets of their cities and towns by badly-constructed or missing ramps. In Portland, broken and missing curb

ramps on Lombard Street in North Portland prevent people in wheelchairs from safely using public transit and going to stores. In Bend, missing curb ramps on Greenwood Avenue force Jordan Ohlde to wheel his chair in the bike lane along the road. In Roseburg, Martha Mae Bryson has to turn her wheelchair around in traffic and go up badly-constructed ramps in reverse because her chair will tip over or get stuck if she goes forward up the ramps.

After 25 years of patiently waiting to be allowed access to the same sidewalks that their taxes helped pay for and that other Oregonians could use freely, Oregonians with disabilities are taking action. With assistance from Disability Rights Oregon, Legal Aid Services of Oregon, and private attorney Stephen Brischetto, these rights violations were brought to ODOT's attention almost a year ago. Attempts at negotiating a remedy have been unsuccessful. This has left Oregonians with disabilities little choice but to file a lawsuit in federal court asking the court to order ODOT to install curb ramps around the state and to improve those that are unusable. The plaintiffs are not asking for money damages, just for ODOT to comply with the law.

A press conference to discuss this lawsuit will be held at 1 PM Tuesday, February 23, at the headquarters of Independent Living Resources, 1839 NE Couch Street in Portland. For comment, please contact Bob Joondeph at Disability Rights Oregon at 503-243-2081 or bob@droregon.org. To arrange a photo or video opportunity with a wheelchair user and an inaccessible location, please contact Tom Stenson at 503-243-2081 or tstenson@droregon.org.