

From: [Anne Malone](#)
To: [Shanna Fitzgerald](#)
Subject: (EXT) Inclusion Advisory Committee
Date: Thursday, September 24, 2020 12:10:36 AM

An OPEN LETTER to:
The City Council of St. John's
The Inclusion Advisory Committee (City of St. John's)
The Citizens of St. John's
While the past year has b

been extremely difficult on all of us, the conditions and extended period of social isolation arising from the ever-increasing proliferation of accessibility barriers that we experience at the hands of our municipal government has become intolerable for people in St. John's who live with disabilities

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Without question, the annual five to six months of enforced confinement to our homes during winter has become the source of undue and unjust suffering and hardship for those of us who have no choice but to endure it.

Those of us who have disabilities are hanging by a thread – economically, socially, physically, and psychologically. We simply do not have the capacity to cope with or overcome the devastating consequences of the discrimination we experience due to the City's adamant denial of their duty to accommodate ALL citizens in this City, regardless of their socio-economic status, age, or physiological and/or neurological realities. We REQUIRE safe, accessible sidewalks, year-round. We can no longer endure long stretches of winter captivity, a state in which we spend virtually half of our lives.

During the past week alone, we have learned that the majority of our municipal leaders have voted to maintain the discriminatory inattention to winter safety for pedestrians, that stories of the inadequacy of our paratransit system are finding their way into the media, and that Metrobus drivers are poised to strike. All of these factors intensify the chronic state of emergency that People with disabilities have experienced, long before Snowmageddon or the COVID19 pandemic occurred.

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To exacerbate the immense burdens that marginalization imposes upon us, it is both devastating and infuriating that the only instrument of influence we have within City Hall - the Inclusion Advisory Committee, has been unable or unwilling to strenuously and publicly protest the injustices that are rife within the City's discriminatory practices as they relate to people with disabilities. Councilor Deanne Stapleton, the Team Lead for Inclusion at the City of St. John's voted AGAINST the rights and interests of people with disabilities - a stunning display of duplicity and betrayal of the most vulnerable and inarguably the most excluded people in our city.

While dozens of concerned citizens, including disability rights activists, social justice activists, student activists, and a host of other allies have invested hundreds of volunteer person-hours over the past week to coordinate a

forceful, multi-faceted response to the infringement of the rights of people with disabilities, not a single publicly funded disability organization has uttered a word of protest or support in the public arena.

Committee members, whatever the reasons for your silence, I strongly urge you to reconsider them, as your silence is an enabling factor in what you know to be an historical pattern of discrimination against people with disabilities in this city and in this province. Your silence is not neutral, it is complicit with institutional ableist discrimination that has forced people with disabilities into an invisible ghetto of socio-economic deprivation and marginalization. You cannot plead ignorance of this reality. Make no mistake, your silence is complicity with the ableism that holds the people with disabilities hostage, not to disability, but to discrimination.

To all organizations represented on the Inclusion Advisory Committee, I urge you to raise your voices on the behalf of people who have disabilities in our city. Disability does not discriminate, and there are people within EVERY community who have disabilities, and those who are BIPOC ,LGBTQ2S+, and people of diverse faiths who also have disabilities find themselves at the intersection of multiple layers of marginalization.

I urge you to stand with them, out loud and in public, for we need the support of the voting public in an escalating inclusion emergency.

Citizens of St. John's, we need your support. Time and time again the institutional biases and discriminatory approach on the part of Council to the disabilities community has been expressed without apology or correction by various people in municipal government. The institutional, systemic ableism that infects our municipal government has been obvious in exclusionary language, exclusionary public spaces, and exclusionary investment and accommodation. The one thing that people with disabilities are not excluded from, however, is the requirement to pay taxes.

Please voice your support of our efforts to force our City to provide us with safe accessible winter sidewalks. You can do this by emailing or calling our Mayor, Deputy Mayor, or your Ward Councilor. You can also support us by participating in the public protest that will be announced later today, Wed. Sept.23.

Our most persistent and unchallenged accessibility barriers are people of privilege who hold positions of power, who repeatedly use their platforms to invalidate, dismiss, and silence the just and righteous advocacy of and for the most vulnerable and marginalized people among us. They must be removed from office. Please support people with disabilities with your vote in the 2021 municipal election.

Accessibility is a RIGHT, not a privilege.

Anne Malone

Disability Rights Activist

Citizen of St. John's