

**For Immediate Release:**

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**A Coalition of Illinois Disability Rights Advocates has Launched a Project to Improve Access to Healthcare Services within Hospitals for Persons with Disabilities**

**Chicago** - Combining education, legislation, advocacy and research, the law firm of Robbins, Salomon and Patt, Ltd., Access Living of Metropolitan Chicago and Equip for Equality, together, are looking to improve access to healthcare services for persons with disabilities in hospitals within Cook, Lake, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, and McHenry counties.

In general, people with disabilities face a number of barriers which at times limits their ability to receive preventative, routine and emergency healthcare services and treatments in hospital settings. In attempting to receive or receiving healthcare services and treatments, people with disabilities often face physical barriers (e.g., architectural and inaccessible examination and diagnostic equipment), attitudinal barriers (e.g., doctors' misconceptions and assumptions about a person's disability that leads to inferior care, neglect, or denial of care), and communication barriers (e.g., lack of services to help communications and accessible formats). For example, persons with mobility impairments often are placed in examination rooms that are too small to maneuver a wheelchair or scooter in, and are often required to remain sitting in their wheelchairs during examinations as examination tables are too high and do not lower. Persons with communication, cognitive and mental health impairments are often released from hospitals early or without notice, and adults with mental health impairments are often referred to pediatric providers or

psychiatric units even if their presenting medical issues are unrelated to mental illness. Persons with blindness and visual impairments often have restrictions placed upon their use of service animals, and are often provided prescription information or care instructions in formats that are not accessible. American Sign Language interpreters are often unavailable, and assistive listening devices are often not offered during hospital visits for persons with deafness and hearing impairments.

According to Andrés Gallegos with Robbins, Salomon and Patt, Ltd., “We [the coalition] are looking to improve access to medical services for persons with disabilities by educating the disability community on their legal rights, and healthcare providers on their legal obligations. We will look at existing legislation to determine whether it is effective, and where needed, we will introduce new legislation to improve access.” Presently, the coalition is gathering stories from persons with disabilities about their in-patient and out-patient experiences in hospitals within Cook, Lake, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, and McHenry counties. “The importance of gathering stories is to identify what and where problems exist. After gathering stories from the disability community in our research efforts, we will then develop one or more advocacy strategies to address the issues we find,” said Barry Taylor, Equip for Equality’s Legal Advocacy Director. According to Judy Panko Reis, Policy Analyst - Healthcare Access with Access Living, who until recently ran the Women’s With Disabilities Center at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, “We know that many women with mobility impairments are having difficulties in finding providers who can accommodate their needs when it comes to gynecological exams, primarily due to the lack of accessible examination tables and lift equipment to safely lift patients onto the exam tables.”

If you or your loved ones have a disability, and would like to share your experiences in hospitals within Cook, Lake, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, and McHenry counties, please contact either Judy Panko Reis, Access Living, (312)

640-2184, toll free (800) 613-8549, toll free TTY (888) 253-7003 or email: jreis@accessliving.org; Sarah Price, Equip for Equality, (312) 341-0022, ext. 7339, toll free 800-537-2632, ext. 7339, toll free TTY 800-610-2779, or email: sarah@equipforequality.org; or Andrés J. Gallegos, Robbins, Salomon and Patt, Ltd., (312) 456-0381 or email: agallegos@rsplaw.com. All conversations are confidential.

Governed and staffed by a majority of people with disabilities, Access Living is Chicago's only center for independent living and works toward the full equality, inclusion and empowerment of all people with disabilities. Equip for Equality is the only statewide, cross-disability, comprehensive advocacy organization providing self-advocacy assistance, legal services, and disability rights education while also engaging in public policy and legislative advocacy and conducting abuse investigations and other oversight activities. Robbins, Salomon and Patt, Ltd. is a full service law firm with offices in Chicago and Glenview. For more information, contact Andrés J. Gallegos, Robbins, Salomon and Patt, Ltd., (312) 456-0381 or email: agallegos@rsplaw.com.

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# Are You A Person With A Disability Who Has Had Problems At A Hospital in the Chicagoland Area?

If you have experienced problems such as:

- Exam rooms too small to move around in
- Exam tables are too high and can't be lowered, or you are told to bring someone to lift you to access medical equipment
- Long waits or refusal of service because of your disability
- Important information not given to you in an accessible format
- No qualified sign language interpreter at appointments
- No service animals allowed

**Report Your Problem & Learn Your Rights by Calling:**

## **Access Living**

Judy Panko Reis, M.A., M.S.  
1-800-613-8549 (Voice)  
1-888-253-7003 (TTY)  
Email: [jreis@accessliving.org](mailto:jreis@accessliving.org)

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**Break Down Barriers to Access**

