

**EMBARGOED UNTIL EVENING OF  
March 11, 2019**

## **Woman Denied Shelter Due to Disability Files Lawsuit Against the City**

*Complaint contends that inaccessibility of the city's shelter system violates the Americans with Disabilities Act and other federal law.*

CHICAGO -- Laura Martin, a woman with rheumatoid arthritis, filed a lawsuit in federal court against the city of Chicago and city officials Monday evening. The suit contends the city violated Martin's rights by failing to provide an accessible homeless shelter.

Martin, supported by attorneys from Porter Wright Morris & Arthur LLP, Access Living, and the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, argues that the city violated Martin's right to be free from discrimination on the basis of her disability by failing to design, fund, and operate an accessible homeless shelter system. Martin uses a cane or walker and has limited mobility as a result of rheumatoid arthritis.

Her condition significantly limits her mobility and prevents her from climbing stairs, walking more than a block at a time, and carrying her own luggage.

In the fall of 2017, Martin was experiencing homelessness and living with a family member while seeking her own subsidized housing unit in Chicago. Martin's family member had to move into a nursing home, leaving her without a place to stay. Because no shelter in the city was accessible to Martin due to her disability, Martin was denied access to shelter in October 2017 and she was forced to stay at a hostel for one night and in hospital waiting rooms for two nights.

According to Martin, "It was terrifying to have nowhere to go just because of a flight of stairs. It was so demeaning to be thrown out of the hospital and have nowhere to turn."

"Housing is one of the greatest obstacles people with disabilities face," said Charles Petrof, senior attorney with Access Living. "While the city spends millions subsidizing high-income housing, it's time they also look at the needs of homeless Chicagoans who can't access homeless shelters."

"People with disabilities fought hard for their rights and this suit seeks to ensure those are met for those experiencing homelessness," said Bob Hermes, partner at Porter Wright.

"People experiencing homelessness are in crisis and should not face the added burden of being denied shelter due to their disability. The city must create a fully accessible shelter system and adequately fund permanent housing for those who in need," said Doug Schenkelberg, executive director of the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless.

Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act protects individuals from discrimination on the basis of disability by public entities. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act prohibits discrimination by recipients of federal funding against otherwise qualified individuals on the basis of their disabilities.

Martin seeks a declaration that the city illegally discriminated against her because of her disability and an order requiring the city to make their homeless shelter program accessible. Martin also seeks compensatory damages.

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