PAUL VALLAS COMMITMENT TO THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY

The Disability Community needs a mayor who is a true advocate. Someone who will not only commit to providing the community with the access and services it needs, but who will actually prioritize them in setting priorities and making determinations in the processes for the budget, contracting and grant awards, as well as to assure fully funded regulatory infrastructure and programs to ensure full implementation. I will be that Mayor.

My Commitment to People with Disabilities. I will:

• Ensure all City facilities adhere to ADA standards and all City departments and agencies that serve the public and that distribute resources act in a way that provides the disability community with full access to these resources and services.

• Initiate, strengthen and monitor City hiring practice strategies to encourage and support City employment of people with disabilities.

• Ensure that all resources from the City and the other governmental enterprises the city controls, including CPS, the Park District, the CTA, the CHA, the Airports, etc., will be allocated to ensure people with disabilities have full access to their resources and services.

• Empower the Mayor’s Office for People with Disability to ensure all city enterprises are inclusive and operating under Universal Design principles (i.e., consider needs of people with disabilities from inception of all programs/projects) and identify and rectify all underfunded regulatory mandates that disproportionately have an adverse impact on people with disabilities.

• Improve data collection, access and transparency respecting programs respecting people with disabilities through the expansion of detailed, user-friendly, interactive data visualization dashboards designed in consultation with the disability community.

• Expect recipients of City and City controlled enterprises from grants, subsidies and contracts to comply with City accessibility and hiring goals.

• Have no more important priority than ensuring that all CPS schools are in full ADA compliance, meet special education mandates, and improve and fully implement ADA25 CPS Legacy project targeting literacy. This means moving to ensure all schools are physically accessible and each and every student is learning.

• Develop a plan to assist charter schools in meeting ADA standards and work to ensure that all charter schools are complying with special education mandates.

Empowering the Disability Community

We need to institutionalize the structure to ensure that the community is empowered through continuous and active input. This means having real input on setting goals, prioritizing budgets, monitoring compliance. We need full transparency and accountability for those who fail to implement policies.

Chicago Disability Advisory Council

To enable the disability community to impact public policy and programs and to hold governmental agencies fully accountable, I will create with the Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities a Chicago Committee for Disability constituted of a nine-member panel selected through an open and transparent application process from which members from the disability community will be selected by the mayor and submitted to the City Council for approval. The Chair and Vice-Chair will be selected by the members, without interference from elected city officials, and will have the authority, among others, to create subcommittees as wanted or needed. The Committee will additionally be supported by a Citizen Advocate. The ordinance mission of this Committee will be to work towards the elimination of physical, programmatic, and attitudinal barriers faced by people with disabilities across the city and to promote and improve participation in all aspects of city life for and with people of disability for their benefit and the benefit of all. The Committee will not only have direct access to the Mayor’s Office, but will be given, via ordinance, authority to publicly review budgets, ADA compliance plans, hiring practices, City budget and development and contracting processes and more to assure .

Placing People with Disabilities in Executive Positions

I will prioritize selecting people from the disability community and recommended by the disability community to fill critical leadership positions in city departments and have representatives on all boards who oversee agencies and entities that impact the public.

This means recruiting qualified people with disabilities to serve in executive positions in Contracts and Procurement, CTA, Transportation, Housing, etc. The advocacy community could help identify qualified individuals for critical appointments in all City departments and agencies. Furthermore, I will make sure that all critical boards have a member who is recommended by the disability community, specifically on the Board of Education, the Community College Board, CTA, the police board, and more.

My Record

There is no candidate in this race who has done more to address the needs of people with disabilities than myself. As someone who for years lived with a severe speech disability and who grew up with a distant disabled cousin who was perhaps my closest school friend and a longtime advocate for people with disabilities, I have long appreciated the role that government needs to play in providing support and full access.

Furthermore, it has been my good fortune of have Sue Gamm as my colleague and advisor for two decades, since I first appointed her as my specialized services chief officer at CPS, further enhanced my appreciation of and actions needed to address the needs of students with disabilities. Sue connected me with key leaders and advocates in the disability community, including the incomparable Marca Bristo who was instrumental in the development of the accessibility component of our $3.2 billion capital plan when I was CPS’s CEO.

Highlights as City Budget Director and Schools CEO

I have a long record of advocating for people with disabilities highlighted by my time spent as City Budget Director where I worked closely with the City’s Director of the Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities and later as CEO of the Chicago Public Schools where I worked with Sue Gamm and the late great Marca Bristo and Access Living, among others in the advocacy community. Consider the following highlights.

• Implemented commitment to Access Living to substantially increase the number of physically accessible CPS schools, with health centers present in all new schools.

• Supported strong working relationship with disability advocates and organizations.

• Promoted the hiring of people with disabilities at the City and at CPS

• Provided record level funding for the Chicago Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities.

• Significantly increased number of young children educated with their nondisabled peers through innovative blended pre-school classes and supported efforts to increase/improve inclusive education for all students

• Supported initiation of the CDC’s Coordinated School Health model, which brought together all CPS departments & community-based organizations related to one of the model’s components, e.g., physical, and behavioral health. Supported advocacy/enrollment of students in Kid Care; creation of vision, hearing, and dental program; etc.