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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMONWEALTH *of* PENNSYLVANIA

House Democratic Policy Committee Hearing

Accessibility: Reality and Law After 36 Years of the ADA

Thursday, October 8, 2026 | 3:30 p.m.

Representative Joe Hohenstein

OPENING REMARKS

3:30 p.m.

Rep. Joe Hohenstein, D-Philadelphia

PANEL ONE

3:35 p.m.

Theo Braddy, Executive Director
National Council on Independent Living

Emily Voorde, Former Associate Director
White House Office of Public Engagement

Shane Feldman, Chief Executive Officer
Innivee Strategies

Candice Davis
Disability Advocate and Leader

Jeremy Yale, Director of Policy and Quality Management
Pennsylvania Office of Developmental Programs

Q & A with Legislators

CLOSING REMARKS

4:40 p.m.

Rep. Joe Hohenstein, D-Philadelphia



Leadership Development Panel Outline

Topics:

- My leadership journey
- The data
- People with disabilities leading our own organizations
- Leading in the Disability Community
- Hiring Leaders with Disabilities
- Close and invitation

1. My leadership journey

- "Leadership is how you act, not your title."
- I spent 20+ years in nonprofit leadership in the Deaf community at the NAD, RID, CSD before founding Innivee Strategies in 2019.
- Why? I saw no Deaf-owned, Deaf-led, ASL-fluent consulting firm serving our community to provide organizations and leaders with the support that they need. So we built one. Last month we celebrated our seven year anniversary of impact on the organizations that we partner with. Our team of four consultants continues to strive to achieve our mission, "Transforming communities through organizational change."
- When I applied to eight executive roles at Deaf organizations where the executive search firm was not Deaf or disability led or owned, seven of them hired non-disabled hearing people. That's when I knew I needed to provide a solution instead of waiting for something to happen.
- That gap was reflected in the numbers too.

2. The data

Our company specializes in providing strategic needs assessments and data reports to help governments, organizations and executives to make informed strategic decisions that have an immediate impact on their communities. Innivee Strategies has provided projects for clients to learn about the landscape for leadership in the disability community. Here is what we know from public sources of information:

- About 5% of nonprofit board members have a disability (BoardSource, Leading with Intent, 2021).
- Only 7.8% of Chief Executives and 13.9% of Board Chairs were satisfied with their board's disability diversity (BoardSource, 2021).
- Fewer than 5% of nonprofit Chief Executives and 3% of Board Chairs have a disability (BoardSource, 2021).
- 72% of organizations have public equal-opportunity policies, but implementation falls short (Disability Belongs, 2018).

- Representation drops as roles rise: 25.1% of non-supervisory staff with disabilities, 16.5% at board level (Change Philanthropy, 2022, philanthropy sector).
- The takeaway: "The pipeline narrows at every step up. People with disabilities are in the workforce. They are not getting to the decision seat..

3. People with Disabilities leading our own organizations

- "Nothing about us, without us" applies to who holds the decision seat, not only who gets consulted.
- Put lived experience in decision-making roles, not only advisory ones. Advisory councils need real decision-making power.
- In practice: Innivee Strategies is Deaf-owned and Deaf-led, working with Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing community organizations across 27+ states.
- Through our work, when we started our executive search services 30% of all leaders at school for the Deaf were Deaf. We have led over 30+ searches in seven years, and today we are proud to share that we have reached 50% of Deaf leaders represented at schools for the Deaf.
- Ask of the room: who in your organization holds the decision seat, and who only advises?

4. Leading in the Disability Community

Please see my one-pager, "Leading in the Disability Community - A Disability-Centric Leader Profile". Here are the five qualities:

1. Visible and unifying.
2. Rights-minded and anti-ableist.
3. Community-led and collaborative.
4. Visionary, innovative, and adaptive.
5. Accountable for excellence and people.

If you want a copy let me know and I will email you. Our experience has shaped the following beliefs:

- Enter as a partner, be curious, ask questions, and trust our judgement.
- Ask the people who live with the barrier before building the fix.
- Change must come from within, with the right support.

5. Leadership hiring

What can a hiring manager do to cultivate the skills of people with disabilities?

- Put people with lived experience on the hiring process, committee and in the final decision.
- Write the position profile around the leadership qualities that match the community.
- Build leaders, pair aspiring leaders to leaders with disabilities, create disability leadership accelerators.



Leading in the Disability Community

This leader profile is built from Innivee Strategies leader profiles that capture what is desired by the communities being served. Communities aspire to hire and be inspired by leaders passionate about disability rights and focused on relationships and results. Adapt to each organization as needed.

Five qualities

- **Visible and unifying.** Shows up where the community is, in person and online. Builds trust through presence, empathy, and follow-through, and brings groups with different needs toward a shared vision.
- **Rights-minded and anti-ableist.** Holds that disability does not define potential. Advocates for equal opportunity with funders, legislators, and employers, and changes attitudes and expectations.
- **Community-led and collaborative.** Asks, then listens. Puts people with lived experience in decision-making roles and builds partnerships with families, agencies, employers, and schools.
- **Visionary, innovative, and adaptive.** Looks ahead at education, technology, and workforce trends, and keeps programs relevant and innovative, with a plan the community can see itself in.
- **Accountable for excellence and people.** Sets high expectations, measures results, recruits and retains strong staff, and stewards resources transparently.

Foundational traits

Humility, integrity, transparency, relationship-oriented and active listener. Must have strong cultural competence, including how disability intersects with race, language, age, and other identities.

Experience to consider

- Leads a complex organization, program, or statewide system with budget and staff accountability.
- Works effectively with a governing board, public agencies, and legislators.
- Brings lived, professional experience with disability.
- Can directly connect with and communicate with each disability community.
- Shows a record of advancing access and inclusion in prior roles.

Synthesized from several Innivee Strategies leader profiles.

Access to the Future: Technology, Disability, and the Promise of the ADA

Hello, everyone.

When we talk about accessibility, we often picture a ramp, an elevator, or an automatic door.

But today, some of the most important doors we walk through are digital.

They are the websites where we apply for jobs, the apps where we schedule medical appointments, the platforms where we learn, build businesses, share our stories, and find community.

And a digital door can be just as closed as a physical one.

My name is Candice Davis. I am a quadruple amputee, a disability advocate, and someone whose life changed dramatically after I contracted COVID-19 in 2021.

Before then, One would have thought I was relatively healthy. I worked out a lot. I was fit and I was working One of my dream jobs as a flight attendant, while I was also studying to complete a nursing degree.

However, in 2021 I became seriously ill.

What followed was heart failure, sepsis, and approximately nine months in the hospital. I became a quadruple amputee, losing

both hands and parts of both lower limbs. I was later diagnosed with transverse myelitis, which also affects my mobility.

I had to learn new ways to do things I once did without thinking.

How to interact with a screen. How to create. How to navigate everyday life in a body with different needs.

Through that process, accessibility became deeply personal.

It became the difference between having an idea and being able to express it. Between needing assistance and having a choice. Between seeing an opportunity and being able to pursue it.

Technology is now part of almost every part of my day.

I use Alexa for just about everything. In the morning, I can ask Alexa about the weather, which helps me decide what to wear. I can use it to turn my lights on and off, listen to music, and watch television.

I also use it to purchase products, which gives me another way to shop without having to depend on someone else for every step.

Lately, I have become more interested in using technology to help pour my morning coffee or tea. Something that many people do without thinking can require planning and assistance for me. Technology can help make that process more manageable and more independent.

I also use speech-to-text on my phone. I use Assistive Access to make my device easier to navigate. These features help me communicate, search for information, send messages, and complete everyday tasks.

I use prosthetic arms to help me cook, clean, and eat. They help me do more for myself and maintain a greater sense of independence.

I'm even use technology to help me find accessible affordable housing right now so if anyone knows of any resources in that area PLEASE connect with me after.

Life, would be a whole lot harder without these options. Having a disability is already hard enough, I should not have to fight through inaccessible technology, too.

That experience shapes how I think about the future.

When we talk about technological progress, I want us to ask:
Who gains access to more possibilities—and who is still waiting?

The Americans with Disabilities Act became law in 1990. It established civil rights protections that helped change expectations about where disabled people belong and what access should look like.

Today, we must carry that commitment into a world increasingly shaped by digital technology.

Our classrooms, workplaces, healthcare services, businesses, and communities now extend across websites, apps, smart devices, and online platforms..

Accessibility has to follow us into those spaces.

A building might have an accessible entrance, but what happens if the appointment can only be booked through an app someone cannot use?

A job might offer remote work, but what happens if its application platform does not work with assistive technology?

An online community might welcome everyone, but what happens if its videos have no captions?

The opportunity is there. The barrier is still there, too.

For someone like me, a small button, a complicated gesture, or a form that expires too quickly can determine whether I complete a task independently.

And independence includes privacy. It includes being able to make a decision or enter personal information without having to involve someone else.

As technology changes, our understanding of accessibility must evolve , with it.

We need to think about the whole experience—from signing in, to completing a task, to getting help when something goes wrong.

We also need to recognize that access looks different for different people.

Someone may use voice commands, speech-to-text, a keyboard, a screen reader, a switch, a stylus, . Someone else may need clear instructions, fewer distractions, or more time.

The future should offer room for those differences.

Artificial intelligence and emerging technologies give us reasons to be hopeful. They could help describe images, make complex information easier to understand, and offer new ways to communicate, work, cook, clean, and create.

But possibility alone does not guarantee access.

A voice tool needs to account for people whose speech sounds different. Automated captions need to be accurate. A new interface needs to work with the assistive technology someone already relies on.

And when a system makes a mistake, people need a usable way to correct it or reach a human being.

We should also ask who can afford these tools.

As a Black woman with a disability, I know our conversation about the future must include cost, representation, and access to resources.

A tool can be life-changing and still be financially out of reach.

A digital service can be thoughtfully designed and still be unavailable to someone without reliable internet, a compatible device, or the support needed to learn how to use it.

Those realities belong in the design conversation from the beginning.

So do disabled people.

We bring expertise developed through daily problem-solving. We adapt tools, find workarounds, and notice barriers that others may never encounter.

Hire us. Include us in leadership. Pay us to test products. Listen while there is still time to change the design.

The ADA gives us a foundation for accountability. Building an accessible future also requires ongoing attention as technology evolves.

That means budgeting for accessibility, testing with people who have different disabilities, and checking again when a product changes.

It means asking more than whether a feature exists.

Can someone actually use it? Can they finish what they came to do? Do they have meaningful choices? Does it provide more autonomy and independence?

My testimony includes loss, adjustment, and learning. It also includes creativity, ambition, and a future I am still building.

We need technology that makes room for all of that.

I want disabled students to learn, professionals to advance, entrepreneurs to build, and creators to share their ideas.

I want people with disabilities to use technology not only to survive, but to participate, contribute, and thrive.

I want our community to help shape what comes next.

Because every technological change gives us another opportunity to expand access—or another barrier we will have to fight to remove.

Let us make those decisions with intention.

The future is being built right now.

And disabled people deserve to be part of building it.

Thank you.