April 29, 2020

RE: Make Pedestrian Signals Automatic for Public Safety

Dear San Diego Region Mayors and City Councilmembers,

We write to recommend transportation actions that will create a safer environment, especially for people with disabilities, during the current public health crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, we strongly support Circulate San Diego's recommendation to replace push-activated pedestrian signals with automatic pedestrian signals.

Disability Rights California is a non-profit agency established under federal law to protect, advocate for and advance the human, legal and service rights of Californians with disabilities.[1] Disability Rights California works in partnership with people with disabilities, striving towards a society that values all people and supports their rights to dignity, freedom, choice and quality of life. Since 1978, Disability Rights California has provided essential legal services to people with disabilities. Disability Rights California provides legal assistance annually on more than 24,000 matters to individuals with disabilities.

We thank you for your leadership during this unprecedented crisis. We urge you to take further steps to support San Diego residents' ability to maintain

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[1]Disability Rights California provides services pursuant to the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act, 42 U.S.C. § 15001, PL 106-402; the Protection and Advocacy for Mentally Ill Individuals Act, 42 U.S.C. § 10801, PL 106-310; the Rehabilitation Act, 29 U.S.C. § 794e, PL 106-402; the Assistive Technology Act, 29 U.S.C. § 3011,3012, PL 105-394; the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act, 42 U.S.C. § 1320b-20, PL 106-170; the Children's Health Act of 2000, 42 U.S.C. § 300d-53, PL 106-310; and the Help America Vote Act of 2002, 42 U.S.C. § 15461-62, PL 107-252; as well as under California Welfare and Institutions Code §§ 4900 *et seq.*

social distancing practices during essential travel. Push-activated pedestrian signals create an obstacle to following social distancing and minimizing the spread of the virus through surface contact. Automatic pedestrian signals which allow people to cross a street without touching a sensor or button are critical to allowing pedestrians to maintain a safe social distance and to minimize the need to touch public surfaces which can spread the virus.
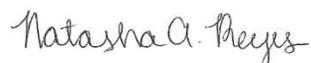
While all pedestrians would benefit from this, it is especially critical to the health of people with disabilities. As you know, people with underlying health conditions are among those with the greatest risk during this health crisis. For those who must travel by foot, every pedestrian button encountered during essential travel like grocery trips presents another risk of contracting or spreading the virus.

San Diego County has 162,730 people with ambulatory disabilities and 53,863 people with visual disabilities, according to the U.S. 2018 Census.[2] For these residents, push-activated pedestrian buttons not only act as another point of possible infection, but also present physical difficulties. Social distancing protocols ask Californians to avoid touching surfaces with their hands, but that creates barriers for pedestrians with ambulatory and visual disabilities. For example, someone using a power wheelchair would have to maneuver their chair to lift their feet to activate a button. For someone using a manual wheelchair, this simply is not an option.

During this pandemic, no one should have to risk their health or the health of fellow community members in order to cross the street.

We urge you to make pedestrian crosswalk signals automatic so that people with disabilities, and all San Diego County pedestrians can walk safely. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Natasha A. Reyes

Natasha A. Reyes
Staff Attorney II

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[2] Last accessed April 29, 2020, at:
https://data.census.gov/cedsci/all?q=ambulatory%20disability%20san%20diego&g=0500000US06073&hidePreview=false&tid=ACSST1Y2018.S1810&t=Disability&vintage=2018&layer=county&cid=S1810_C01_001E&y=2018.