

Maura Healey – “Conversation on Disability Rights “ March 9, 2014
Home of Chris Palames & Judy Kimberly
659 Park Hill Rd. Northampton, Mass

MHealey: “ I can’t tell you how wonderful it is for me to be here this morning with this kind of an audience. This is work that has meant a great deal to me. It is work that I have had the benefit of doing these last several years with folks like Chris Palames. And I have grown as an attorney, I have grown as a leader. And as your next Attorney General you will have somebody, who will look to move the ball forward on disability rights in a way we have not to date. “

“ I’m here today to continue a conversation that for me actually began a while ago. I had the opportunity to work for a judge in federal court, judge Reginald Lindsay. Judge Lindsay had grown up in Birmingham Alabama in the sixties. A young African American man who had come through so much of the civil rights struggles, who has broken through so many of the barriers getting himself to Massachusetts and into Harvard Law School and onto a prestigious practice, and then onto the federal bench.

But Judge Lindsay was in a wheelchair. He went into a chair, probably in his forties, as the result of a spinal disease. We became very close, and we used to talk about his having to confront the very same kind of barriers that he had worked so hard to over come as a young black man in South.

These stories are not different, they are not new.

Through him I learned a great deal. We used to go out to dinner and to various functions -- and how many times did we get out of the car and move across a cross walk leading to a side walk with no curb cut? How many times did we go into a restaurant or hotel space with inaccessible restrooms? How many times did we see courthouses, which are supposed to represent access to democracy and justice, inaccessible to those with disabilities?

So I knew when I started as Civil Rights Chief in the Attorney General’s Office that we had a long way to go, and a lot of work to do.

For me it’s pretty basic. I bring to this work a commitment to civil rights and to advocacy. It is what drives me, it is what informs me, and it is what I want to make real!

I believe that everyone should have access to the basic building blocks of society; education, housing, jobs, transportation, recreation. These

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things make up the fabric of our lives. they make life what it should for our families and for each or us as individuals

Disability Rights are Civil Rights

I understand what the rights and empowerment of people with disabilities are about -- that for many of us it is direct and personal. We may be someone with a disability. We may have someone in our family with a disability. And most of us someday - through illness or injury or aging are going to become a person with a disability.

Disability touches all of us. . . crosses all categories of race, gender, socio-economic status. As a civil rights advocate, I understand how destructive discrimination is to individual's and to the community as a whole. And I want you to know that as Attorney I will to do everything in my power to break down barriers, to tear down the walls of separation and discrimination.

I received some attention for a case that I brought on behalf of the state a few years ago, a lawsuit challenging the federal Defensive of Marriage Act, that discriminated against gay families. It was a victory. We were ultimately successful and led the nation in the first successful challenge to that law.

It was an important victory of LGBT rights. But for me it represented something much more than that. It was about fairness! It was about equality! And that is what we are talking about here today. Making sure that we are moving forward in making real, *equality*; in making real, *access* !

And in the same way Massachusetts leads the country in LGBT rights and equality, Massachusetts should lead the country in disability rights! And as your Attorney General I will make sure that happens!

(Applause)

“I’m committed to personally and professionally, making real the values of Americans with Disabilities Act and Title II. My goals are:

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To strengthen community based services in every way possible,

To ensure that people with disabilities are able to live with
independence and with dignity

To change policies that force families and individuals into poverty, in
order to become eligible for services.

And to end discriminatory displacement of people with disabilities from
homes and communities that forces them to live in separate and
segregated settings.

This is the spirit behind Olmstead, the Supreme Court decision that
embodies the integration mandate at the heart of the American With
Disabilities Act.

(Applause)

I had an experience a year and a half ago. My grandparents both lived
into their nineties, so I saw then through the progression of cane, to
walker to wheelchair. I also saw how my times they were able to go
about in their wheelchairs with my young niece, being pushed along by
my sister in the stroller. I saw how accessibility works for all of us? This
was what it is all about, and how beautiful to see and be part of the
generations enjoying one another.

“We are living in an age when technology enables us to do many
wonderful things. I spent some time a few years ago making sure that as
technology advances, people with disabilities aren’t left behind. And as
Attorney General want to make sure that as we go forward, we use
technology to break down barriers to communication, that we use
technology to strengthen democracy -- especially for people with
disabilities.

And so, I am committed to strengthening the open meeting law to
welcome and promote full participation of people with disabilities.

“Applause”

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“Breaking down barriers to communication is about making our democracy real -- real democracy at its core is all about communication. And when advocacy is needed to make that happen, I’ll join in that.

Part of it is a fight, and part of it is education. I fundamentally believe that people want to do good. They do not always know the way, and you sometimes have to show them. And that’s what I will do. Whether its fighting for civil rights or protecting consumers, or making sure people have access to healthcare: these are core principles for me.

I’m the oldest of five kids, my mom’s a school nurse, my dad teaches high school history, my grandparents were immigrants to this country who made a lot of opportunities available to my four brothers and sisters and me through hard work.

And these are the values that I grew up with, that I was surrounded by in my family and by those who inspired me like Judge Lindsay who I spoke of earlier. These are the values drive me.

Explain to people why it matters that they have somebody serving as Attorney General, making legal decisions every day that affect the lives of the seven million people living in this Commonwealth.

Explain to them why they should care. Explain to them that the Attorney General is the one who is going to be there to protect your rights, the one to fight for you when someone is polluting the stream behind your home, or a business owner is not complying with the ADA, or a woman is threatened with intimidation at a helath care clinic, or a predatory lender is scamming your mother or scamming a young person trying to get a student loan. Your AG is there to protect you from abusive predatory consumer practices, your AG is there to fight for your rights.