



Accessible to Who?

Why Won't the Shelter Let me Use My CPAP, and other Reasons People with Disabilities Are Not Housed.

Run of Show

- Who are we?
- Who is Disability Rights Texas?
- What trends are we seeing re: housing and shelters for people with disabilities?
- What barriers are there to equitable housing?
- What's the law?
- Policy solutions to promote equitable housing

Rachel Cohen-Miller

- Over a decade doing housing discrimination work.
- 8+ years at Disability Rights Texas working with and for a diverse group of people with disabilities.
 - Litigated cases in State and Federal courts against HOA's, cities, landlords, and others.
 - Creative solutions to systemic issues.
 - Addressing debt, evictions, and housing stability.

Why Rachel Cares

- Person with Disabilities
- Lifetime interacting with People with Disabilities.
- Housing.
- What roles do I play?
 - Spouse, Parent & Bonus Parent, Child, Teacher, Soap Maker, etc...



Tanya Lavelle

- 12+ years of experience in the policy space
 - Almost 4 years at DRTx
- Focus on the intersection of housing and healthcare
- January 2025 will be my 7th Texas Legislative Session
- Worked on legislation to study employment, expand affordable housing and improve disaster response for people with disabilities

Why Tanya Cares

- Person with a few invisible disabilities
- Personal experience with a fractured health insurance system
- Dragged into housing advocacy – a learned passion
- What roles do I play?
 - Spouse, parent, activist, musician, baker, Rachel's underling...



About Disability Rights Texas

- Part of the national Protection and Advocacy (P&A) System established in 1977 through federal law.
- Nonprofit legal firm with the mission to protect and advocate for the rights of Texans with disabilities to ensure their equal participation in society.
- Free legal advocacy services provided to Texans of all ages with a wide variety of disabilities.
- Watch our explainer video to learn more: www.DRTx.org/WhatWeDo

Services Offered

- Provide direct legal assistance to people with disabilities whose rights are threatened or violated
- Protect rights of individuals and groups of people with disabilities through courts and justice system
- Inform policy makers about how issues impact people with disabilities
- Educate people with disabilities and family members about their rights
- Make referrals to programs and services

Key Focus Areas

- Accessibility
- Alternatives to Guardianship
- Community Integration
- Disaster Resilience
- Early Childhood Intervention
- Education (K-12)
- Employment
- Healthcare
- Housing
- Institutional Rights and Civil Liberties
- Transportation
- Voting

DRTx Housing Services

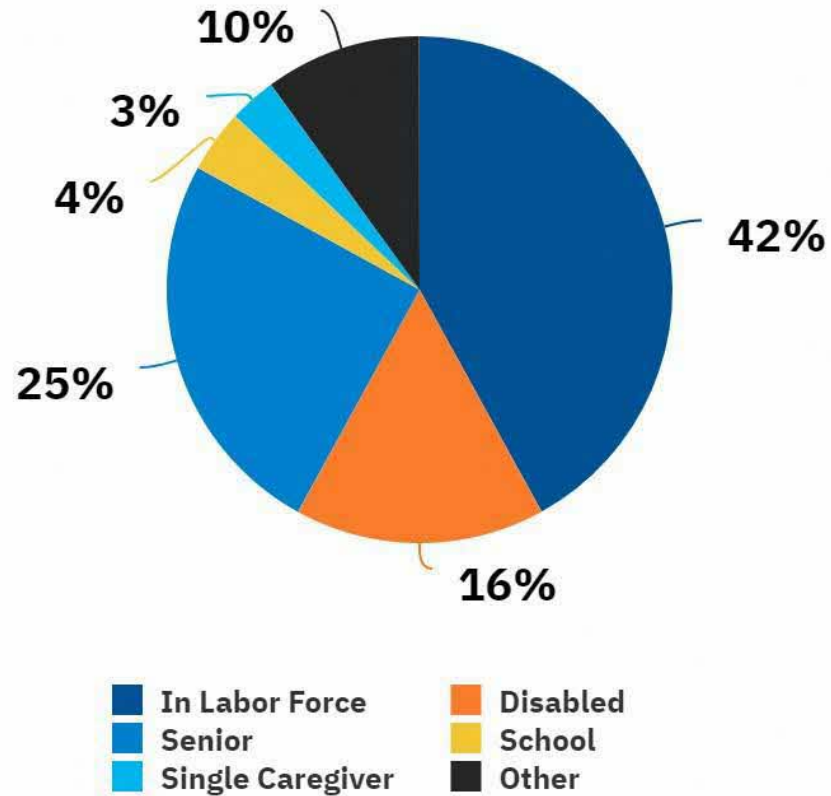
- Address housing discrimination by governments, HOA's, housing providers, and others against persons with disabilities in Texas via:
 - litigation, negotiations, informal advocacy, advocacy, policy, and other creative means.
- We help people request accommodations so they can enjoy their homes as would a person without a disability (**equitable housing**):
 - Break lease early (DRTx online letter generator)
 - Have a support animal
 - Payment plan (DRTx online letter generator)

What Trends Are We Seeing?

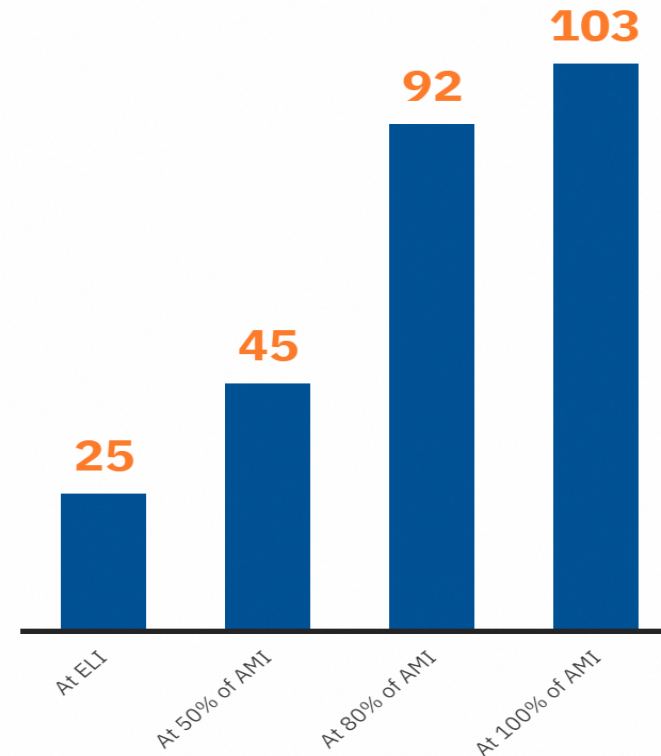
- What does the Texas renter population look like?
- Low-income housing in Texas
- Shelter system in Texas
- Barriers to equitable housing
 - Disability-related stigma
 - Breakdowns in communication – landlords just don't want to deal with it.
 - Intentional discrimination

Renter Households in Texas

RENTER HOUSEHOLDS



HOMES PER 100 RENTER HOUSEHOLDS



Source: 2022 ACS PUMS

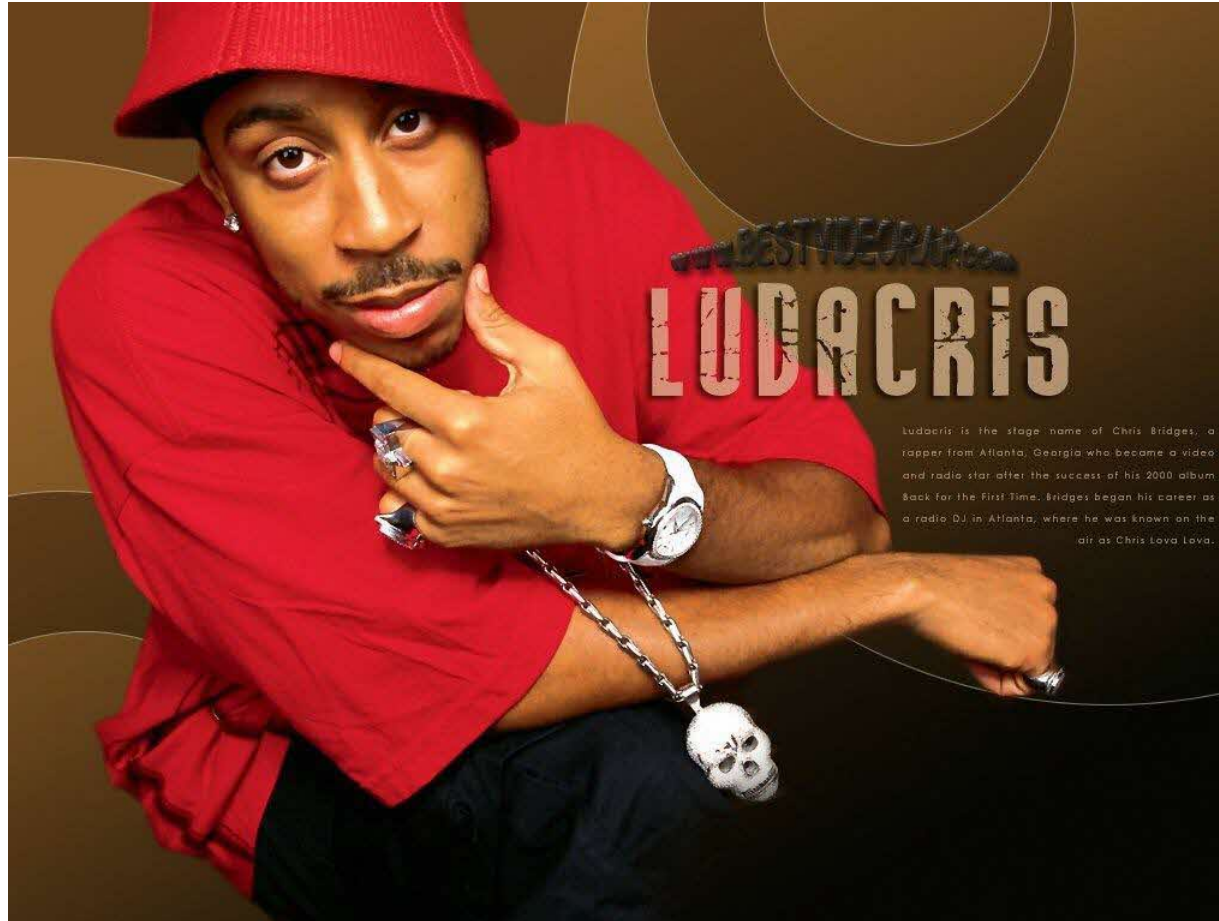
Low Income Housing in Texas

- There are nearly 907,000 extremely low income (ELI) households in TX (22% of all renter households)
- Shortage of 670,000+ units affordable and available to ELI households
- 25/100 units affordable and available to ELI households, BUT:
 - Austin area: 21/100
 - Dallas area: 17/100
 - Houston area: 15/100
- Despite this, Texas invests nearly nothing in housing

Shelter System in Texas

- Safety net for people experiencing homelessness
- Can provide short and/or long term stays
- Include coordinated care services to help people transition into more permanent housing
- Can also provide transition services during disasters
- Unfortunately, there are issues when it comes to shelters understanding the needs of people with disabilities experiencing homelessness...

Barriers to Equitable Housing are...



Barrier to Equitable Housing: Disability-related Stigma

- Belief that people with disabilities are bad.
- Invisible disabilities: can't see it, it's not there
 - Neurological conditions
 - People experiencing mental illness
 - Between 15-20% of the population is neurodivergent. [Forbes Article](#).
- Stigma associated with people with low incomes

Barrier to Equitable Housing: Breakdowns in Communication

- Barriers to asking or applying for housing/a shelter
- Barriers while in housing/a shelter (if you can get in)
- What can we do about it?

Barrier to Equitable Housing: Intentional Discrimination

- How do we know it's happening?
- Refusing to Shelter Someone that Uses a CPAP machine.
- When the only people turned down are those referred by an agency, those with a provider that needs to sign the lease, and other tells.
- What do you do about it?

What is the Law?

- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
 - Federal Funding
- Americans with Disabilities Act
 - Governmental Entities
 - Places of Public Accommodation
- Fair Housing Act
 - Applies to most entities that provide housing, help people find or get funding for housing, any person or entity that can control your housing.

What do the Laws Require?

- Changes to policies, procedures, or programs to make sure people with disabilities get to access the programs.
 - There are limits to what can be changed
- Cannot discriminate because of disability (among other things).

When Housing Providers Refuse?

- Sometimes a letter fixes any "miscommunications"
- Administrative Complaint
 - The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), State of Texas, or local municipalities.
- Lawsuit
 - State or Federal Court
- Other Creative Advocacy

Policy Solutions - Systems

- Policy work can make meaningful systems-change at local, state and federal levels
 - Circumvent the courts
- Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA)
 - Agency that oversees housing in TX including much of the state's affordable housing development
 - Makes sure laws are implemented correctly
- Inclusive Disaster Planning – HB 2858 by Morales Shaw (88R)
 - Ensure localities consider persons with disabilities when creating local disaster plans

Policy Solutions - Programs

- Policies can create new programs meant to improve housing equality
- Texas Tenant Readiness and Landlord Incentive Program (TRLI) – HB 1917 by Walle (88R)
 - 4-year pilot program, \$4 million total request of legislature
 - TDHCA contracts with nonprofits to identify voucher-holders in need of housing assistance
 - \$3,500 to households to remove housing barriers including deposits, furniture, utility bills.

Policy Solutions - Programs

- Policies can improve upon current programs
- Supportive Housing Rental Assistance Program (SHR) – Senate Rider #128 (88R)
 - \$12 million request of legislature
 - Better-fund supportive housing services for people at risk of homelessness/experiencing homelessness already connected with Local Mental Health Authority (LMHA)

How to Apply for DRTx Services

- Statewide Intake Lines:
 - 1-800-252-9108
 - 1-866-362-2851 (Sign Language Video Phone)
 - 512-271-9391 (Purple 2 Video Phone)
- Online Intake: Intake.DRTx.org
- Self-advocacy resources, information about our services: www.DRTx.org