

**Madalyn Letellier**

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**From:** m [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 12, 2025 5:24 PM  
**To:** Public Comments  
**Subject:** Re: Agenda item - 4.14. Legistar item ID # 25-0474  
**Attachments:** Statement supporting 504.pdf

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In support of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and condemning attacks on disability rights.

Namaste.  
M. Michael Shaps

M. Michael Shaps  
[REDACTED]  
Somerville, MA 02144  
Ward 5

March 13, 2025

Re: Agenda item - 4.14. item ID # 25-0474

Statement in support of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and condemning attacks on disability rights.

Today, I write to you not only as a school psychologist of over 30 years or as a Commissioner on the Somerville Commission for Persons with Disabilities but as an individual who has personally experienced the transformative power of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. I am here not just to write about policy but to speak from the heart and from my lived experience. As a person who has been living with Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD), I know firsthand how vital these protections are for people who, like me, face challenges that others may never fully understand.

For over three decades, I have witnessed the extraordinary impact of Section 504 on students, families, and communities. It has been a lifeline for countless individuals, offering them the support they need to thrive in environments that might otherwise be inaccessible. This law, which ensures that people with disabilities—whether visible or invisible—are afforded the accommodations and resources they need to participate fully in

education, employment, housing, and healthcare, is not just a policy. It is a promise. A promise that every person, regardless of the challenges they face, is entitled to dignity, respect, and opportunity.

But today, that promise is under threat. We see attacks on the very rights that Section 504 guarantees, and we must not stand idly by. These attacks are not just on a law or a policy—they are attacks on the lives of real people. They are attacks on children who deserve an equal education, on workers who deserve to feel safe and supported in their jobs, on families who need secure housing, and on individuals who are seeking the medical care they need to live with dignity.

I can write personally to this. In the past few years, as I navigated the difficult journey of living with CPTSD, I turned to Section 504 for the accommodations I needed to do my job, to care for myself, and to maintain my health. The accommodations were not extraordinary—just simple, necessary adjustments that allowed me to manage the challenges of my condition while still contributing to my community. Without Section 504, I would not have been able to work, to continue supporting my students, or even to care for myself in the ways that I needed to heal.

Section 504 has never been just a “nice-to-have.” It is a *must-have*. It has been a fundamental building block in ensuring that people with disabilities can live full, meaningful lives. To lose these rights—these hard-won protections in education, housing, employment, and medical care—would be a

devastating blow to millions of Americans. It would create an environment where the most vulnerable are cast aside, left to struggle without the tools they need to succeed. This is not the world we deserve, and it is certainly not the world we want to build.

We must stand in unwavering support of Section 504, and we must speak out against any attempt to undermine it. We must advocate for every person who relies on these accommodations, for every child who needs the resources to learn, for every individual who deserves access to equal opportunities. The very essence of our democracy is rooted in the belief that all people should be treated with fairness and dignity. Section 504 embodies that belief, and it is our responsibility to protect it.

This is not just a fight for legal rights—it is a fight for human rights. It is a fight for justice. And it is a fight for every person who has ever felt that their worth or their needs were overlooked or dismissed. Together, we must demand that these rights remain intact, and that they are not eroded by those who fail to recognize the importance of equity and inclusion.

So I ask you—no, I implore you—to join me in this fight. Let us raise our voices in support of Section 504. Let us push back against any efforts to take away the protections that so many of us rely on. We cannot—and we will not—let these attacks stand. For every person with a disability, for every person who has been marginalized, for every person who deserves a chance

to live fully and freely, we must say loud and clear: *We will not let you go back. We will not let you fall.*

Together, we can ensure that Section 504 remains a cornerstone of justice and equality for all. Together, we can build a world where everyone has a seat at the table, where every person is seen, heard, and valued. Let us not waver. Let us not falter. Let us rise and fight for the rights of all.

I hope that you will pass this resolution to support 504 not only for the citizens of Somerville but to be an example for all the other cities and states to stand with us against this discrimination.

Thank you.

M. Michael Shaps