

## Letter of Intent

Somerville Commission for Persons with Disabilities

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Danielle O’Hearn, and I am writing to express my interest in serving on the Somerville Commission for Persons with Disabilities. I have lived, worked, raised my family, and served this city for the past twenty years, both as a Lieutenant in the Somerville Fire Department and as an active member of our community. My desire to serve on the Commission comes from both personal experience and professional dedication—each shaping the way I understand disability, accessibility, and the importance of inclusion in everyday life.

My understanding of disability advocacy began very early. I grew up with an aunt who has cerebral palsy, and she was one of my first teachers in compassion, independence, joy, and dignity. Through her, I learned at a young age that every person has value and belongs—not because of what they can do, but simply because they are part of our community. That foundation shaped how I see the world and how I show up for others.

Later in life, I became a mother to a child with nonverbal autism. This deepened my understanding even further. Parenting a disabled child has given me firsthand insight into the barriers—both visible and invisible—that families navigate every day. Communication access, sensory-friendly environments, public inclusion, and understanding from the community aren’t extras; they are essential to belonging.

This belief inspired me to develop and gain Council approval in 2021 for communication boards to be installed in all 27 Somerville parks, and later in school spaces, to ensure our nonverbal children and adults could have a way to express themselves and be seen.

Professionally, my work in the fire service has given me an intimate understanding of our city, its strengths, the needs of its residents, and the importance of collaborative leadership. I also serve as a handler to a certified First Responder Therapy Dog, who visits schools and special education classrooms in Somerville. These visits help students build positive relationships, emotional regulation skills, and gentle exposure experiences that support trust and connection. This work reminds me every day how small, kind acts can have a profound impact.

I am seeking to join the Commission because I want to actively contribute to a Somerville where every resident is able to participate fully in community life. I want to be part of expanding opportunities,

programs, and experiences—like the annual Red Sox game trip—that celebrate inclusion and joy. I want to continue advocating for accessibility, representation, and dignity, while working alongside others who share the belief that belonging is not a privilege—it is a right.

I bring lived experience, professional commitment, and a willingness to listen, collaborate, and take action. It would be an honor to contribute to this important work, and to help build a city where our disabled community is supported, valued, and empowered.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Warmly,

Danielle O’Hear