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Twenty six years after the passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), persons with disabilities continue to face huge obstacles in achieving their fundamental right to full inclusion within all areas of their communities. Regrettably, the producers of the December 4th 60 Minutes segment addressing the Americans with Disabilities Act and “drive-by lawsuits” were not aware of this glaring fact. The ADA was signed into law to expand legal protections for people with disabilities while opening opportunities for their full participation in community life. However, despite its passage over 26 years ago, the disability community has yet to be fully integrated and accepted within all segments of society. People with disabilities are still discriminated against by businesses that either don’t take our needs into account or openly exclude us.

Unfortunately, there is no mechanism for compliance under the law and, as a result, businesses do not take the ADA seriously until they receive a complaint. The burden rests on the individual with a disability to monitor compliance, as they are the ones who must bring complaints upon being denied access to a business establishment. 60 Minutes presented an unfair and unbalanced story that did nothing to accurately depict the ongoing discrimination that millions of persons with disabilities face every day in this country when they are denied access to a places of public accommodation in their own communities.

Our community faces across-the-board discrimination in obtaining affordable and accessible housing, full access to public buildings and services, employment, an equitable education, adequate public transportation, and options for community-based supports that prevent unnecessary institutionalization. In addition, court decisions that attempt to strip the civil rights protections for people with disabilities continue, which reset legal precedent for guaranteeing their freedom, independence and choice as was promised under the ADA.

The 60 Minutes segment’s portrayal of people with disabilities was patronizing and inaccurate, and we demand better. We strongly urge Anderson Cooper and 60 Minutes to air another segment that gives equal airtime to the struggle of the millions of Americans with disabilities who still lack basic access to our communities.

Lisa Tarricone

Director, Systems Advocacy