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Activating Change

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10:30 p.m. – 12:30 p.m. ET

Remote CART Captioning

[Recording in progress].

>> SANDRA HARRELL: Good afternoon, everyone. This is Sandra Harrell with Activating Change. We will be starting promptly at 2:00 p.m. Eastern time. So, in about three minutes. If you have a question or need any assistance, please send us a message in the Q&A pod. And again, we will be starting promptly at 2:00 p.m. Eastern time. Thank you.

>> SANDRA HARRELL: This is Sandra. Just letting people know that we will get started promptly at 2:00 p.m. If you have any questions or need any assistance, please send us a message in the Q&A pod.

>> SANDRA HARRELL: This is Sandra with Activating Change. Welcome today to our webinar which is part of the our overrepresented and overlooked webinar series. We're delighted for you to be here today. I am a white woman with dark blonde hair. I'm wearing dark rimmed glasses and dark gray shirt. Behind -- my background is blurred behind me. Before we get started today, I want to just provide some information about the accessibility features of our Zoom webinar platform. As well as how you can interact with us throughout the session today. You should be in listen only, view only mode. That means you can hear and see us, but we cannot hear and see you. If you would like to turn the captioning on, please go to the closed captioning symbol at the bottom of your screen and select the arrow to the right of the icon. The words underneath the icon should say "live transcript". You could either select show subtitle or view full transcript. Once you do that, you will see the words I am speaking appearing below my video or below the video window there if you have chosen show subtitle. Or to the right of your Zoom window if you have chosen show full transcript. But please note that full transcript view may obstruct your view of the chat. So, just wanted people to know that. We do have a multi-lingual space today. We have American Sign Language interpretation and Spanish language interpretation available throughout the webinar today. If you requested spoken language interpretation, one of my colleagues will be posting how to activate that in the chat. There will be interpreter switches throughout today's webinar. But there shouldn't be any significant pauses in the interpreter switches as they are going to be coordinating with one another. But if you have any issues with the interpreters or captioning at any point during this webinar, please let us know in the chat and we will pause to address any concerns right away. We do value complete access in our virtual sessions. So, if there's a technical problem such as an issue with our captioning or interpreters, we will pause to address that issue. In the unlikely

case that we cannot resolve an issue, we may have to cancel this session. And if we do that, we will send you an information -- an email with more information about the rescheduled webinar. We do ask that you feel free to use the chat to communicate with each other and with us, if you would like. But if you have a question for the presenters, please use the Q&A pod. There tends to be a lot of traffic in the chat pod and important questions can get lost. Plop so, if you have a question, please put it in the Q&A pod. If you would like to ask a question in American Sign Language or another language you have requested, please raise your hand. We will confirm your need so we could give you the microphone or video privileges and you will be able to ask your question. Just so you know, we will likely hold most questions until the end of our discussion today. While the panelists may see a question in the Q&A pod that they feel is relevant to the conversation at hand, for the vast majority of questions, we are going to be holding those until the end. Just a quick note about the chat pod. You cannot save the chat or copy and paste from the chat. This is a security measure. So, if we share links in the chat, we will make sure to include them in the participant material. Right now, you should be seeing our panelists in gallery view. If you are having trouble with your view, please let us know in the chat box. We are recording today's webinar. And that recording and any materials associated with this session today will be made available to you within about 2 weeks. And with that, I'm going to turn it over to Olga to get us started.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Thank you, Sandra. Hi, everyone. Thanks so much for joining us today. I am Olga Trujillo. And my pronouns are they/she. I'm the Director of Leadership Development, Visibility and Collective Healing here at activating change.

Before I introduce our webinar, I will first describe myself. I'm a Latinx non-binary person with short grey hair.

I comb forward. I wear black wire rim glasses and am wearing a black turtleneck with a grey and brown sweater.

I'm working in my home office and behind me are some pictures hanging on the wall, a bifold door and a green carpet with a colorful rug on top.

You will also see my -- I have two dogs with me in the room. One is directly behind my chair, who is our dog, Finney. You may hear our dog, Sammy during our session. Before I get into the webinar today, I felt like I wanted to take a moment to note the senseless killing of Tyre Nichols by five Memphis police officers.

I didn't think that we could have a webinar today around the impact of structural oppressions on people of color without saying something about what happened. This just keeps happening and it's yet another illustration of the danger Black and Brown people are in and especially Black and Brown Deaf and disabled people. I think I read that Mr. Nichols was given 71 commands to respond to in 13 minutes. And some of those commands were in contradiction of previous commands. This incidents and all the incidents before and sense that we haven't heard about is why our work here feels so critical. And we thank you for being with us here to learn more and to see what you can do in your work. As we mentioned, this is part 2 of a three-part series that is hosted by Activating Change. And we are at -- and we are a strategic ally with the Safety and Justice Challenge. This webinar will focus on "The Impact of Structural Oppressions on People of Color with Disabilities" and will feature a panel of BIPOC Deaf and

Disabled people, who will share how ableism, audism, and racism have intersected in their lives. Before I get to our panel members, I want to do a brief recap of our first webinar for those who are in attendance today that were not able to join on January 10th. Also if you were not able to join, you can view the recording of the first webinar. And I think a link will be placed in the chat as to where you can access that. I'm going to share my screen and go through a PowerPoint. I will take a few seconds after I share my screen so, that anyone who needs the interpreters can pin them or access them. Okay. So, in the first webinar we covered a very short introduction about the disability -- disability in the U.S. Deaf culture and the overrepresentation of people with disabilities and Deaf people. Especially BIPOC in prisons and in jails. And we touched upon how this happens. Also wanted to mention for those of you who weren't at our first, Activating Change is a new non-profit organization that has spun off from a previous organization. And our mission is to end victimization, criminalization, incarceration and institutionalization of people with disabilities and Deaf people. And our goal is safety and freedom, not harm and punishment, for people with disabilities. So, again, I'm going to recap our January 10th webinar and then we're going to explore how ableism, audism and racism impact the lives of Black, Indigenous and other people of color with disabilities and Deaf BIPOC. And then we are going to explore the work that Black, Indigenous, People of Color with disabilities and deaf BIPOC are doing to stress the factors that contribute to the overrepresentation of people with disabilities in our jails. Before we go forward, I just want to make a note about language. We did this in our first webinar and it is important to do it again. Especially if you're new to thinking about and working with people with disabilities and Deaf people. As we mentioned during our first webinar, people with disabilities have been subjected to devaluation, marginalization, prejudice and more. And the first way to devalue someone is through language. By using words and labels to identify a person, group as less than, as the "other", not like us and so forth. Once a person or group has been identified this way, it makes it easier to justify prejudice and discrimination. Our language shapes our attitudes and our attitudes shape our language. They are intertwined. And our attitudes and language drive our actions. >> I'm so sorry to interrupt you. Olga, I wanted to let you know that it's on presenter view.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Oh. Thank you.

>> So sorry, again.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: No. No. That is totally fine. Let me switch -- one second. Thanks so much, Supreet. Now I am hoping you see just the slide. So, as a general rule, using people-first language, putting the person before the disability and eliminating all prejudicial and hurtful descriptors, I also wanted to note -- so an example of this instead of referring to someone as a paraplegic man, you would refer to them as a person with paraplegia. But language is evolving. Just where people have been marginalized and language has been used to make them less than or other, people in those groups are taking back those terms and using them. And so, you're seeing more and more people describe themselves as a disabled person. As a neurodivergent person. And those are people that don't feel that you can -- that their disability can be pulled away from who they are. Also, Deaf people in our society don't necessarily see themselves as having a disability. And in fact, it's more of a cultural group. So,

you will see that we will use the capital D for Deaf people or when we're describing anyone who is deaf. Okay. So, to be really kind of as a general rule, if you use people-first language and always -- because it is usually the person with a disability that will describe themselves as disabled, neurodivergent, Mad, whatever their terms. But you would still use people-first language. Let's kind of touch on a couple of other things that we talked about. So, there is an overrepresentation of people with disabilities and Deaf people in our prisons and jails. And what we delved into on the 10th was that the numbers that we have is anywhere from -- one, that the studies that we've used are not -- the numbers aren't as high as are actually in our prisons and jails. But what we are seeing is that at least 43% of people with disabilities are arrested by the age of 28. And if you look at the racial disparities within those numbers, it is actually Black people with disabilities that are arrested at a much higher rate than their white counterparts or Hispanic counterparts. You will see 46% of Hispanic people or Latinos are arrested by the time they are 28. And 55% of Black people with disabilities. And then also what we're seeing is 64% of people in jails have serious psychological distress within the past month and also have been told by a clinician in the past that they have a serious mental health disorder. This overrepresentation -- so this Bureau of Justice Statistics -- has identified 40% of men and half of women in jails. We think about it, 26, 27% of the population are people with disabilities. But at the very least, 40% of men and half of women in jails have a disability. And then if you look at studies that -- there's different ways that these studies are happening and the BJS study is more restrictive. And if you look at studies that are more inclusive, you will find that the numbers are much higher, which is 80% of women and 65% of men in prisons have a disability. So, what are the drivers to that? What we talked about the last time was that it's criminalization. And it's overpolicing of homeless, of addiction and of poverty. And if you think about it, it's really the criminalization of having a disability in the U.S. Because these are all manifestations of disabilities. The medication that is used. Oftentimes people are using substances to deal with the pain or some of the other side effects of the disability. Homelessness. About 78% of those that are homelessness have been down to have disabilities. And they have atypical reactions to social cues. And we will see in our panelist presentation the ways that homelessness and poverty affects people with disabilities and how people with disabilities are basically put in these positions. And there's also the criminalization of Deaf people. And what we've seen in a number of different cases is when someone is unable to respond to commands that are given without ASL interpreters, those things can result in arrest, in use of force and worse. A movement involved in communication is oftentimes misinterpreted as danger and can result in state violence. And being unable to understand what is happening or be able to clarify misconceptions can result in being jailed for no reason. And we have seen this and talked about this in our last session. We gave a few examples of this. So, I want to stop there because we have it kind of set up in our society that people with disabilities are criminalized and Deaf people are criminalized. So, I'm going to turn now to our panel to explore this a little bit further. Let me conclude this real estate cap with a thought. That ableism, audism and racism comes together to make the perfect storm against people with disabilities and Deaf people. We see this throughout our society and it has dire consequences. And so, what I would like to do is I'm going to turn to our panel members. But

first what I am going to do is give you a sense of who they are and then I will ask them to add anything else they would like to. And then also to describe themselves. So, today we have with us Max Barrows. Max Barrows is Outreach Director for Green Mountain Self-Advocates, a position he has held since 2007. He mentors youth and adults with developmental disabilities to speak up for themselves and become leaders. Max connects with people on all levels advocating for true-inclusion of people with developmental disabilities. Max coordinates technical assistance for SARTAC, the national Self Advocacy Resource and Technical Assistance Center. In his work, he advances the message that when you meet an individual with a disability, presume competence. He received a White House Champions of Change award for this work in 2015. And Max and I have worked together quite a bit in the past few years. And I know one of the things about Max is that he likes extreme weather. [Laughing]. All right. We have with us Renee Lopez. Renee Lopez graduated from the University of Texas in 1984 and with a bachelor's degree and in 1986 with a masters. She worked for the State of Texas for 30 years and is now retired. And I want to say retired with air quotes because Renee works really hard. [Laughing]. Renee has a long history of advocating for the rights of people with disabilities, starting in 1982 when a student at The University of Texas. As a student with a life-long physical disability, she joined other students with disabilities for campus accessibility. She continues to advocate to this day. And thank you so much for being with us, Renee. And last I want to introduce Brandon "BL" Williams. I will refer to you as BL. BL, he/him, is a light-skinned Black Deaf cis-male that was born in Dallas, Texas, and raised in Arkansas. I think now you are in the Washington, D.C. area. Start right? Okay. He comes from six generations of Black Deaf family members by way of his father. This experience, among many others, has given him an acute awareness of how various systems of oppression play a role in organizations, educational institutions, and within society as a whole. BL engages in individual, interpersonal, and inter-community work as a trainer, mediator, and consultant on topics that revolve around introspectiveness, historic and present recognition of harm/violence and systemic fallacies, and an ongoing pursuit of individual and collective transformation within K-12 programs, post-secondary settings, workplaces, and within broader communities. Thanks so much for being with us, BL. Okay.

Let me give you a minute to add anything else that you all would like to add to your introduction and then to describe yourself. Max, would you mind starting us off?

>> MAX BARROWS: I can. So, as mentioned, some, but I will pick up the tab. Hi, I am Max Barrows. I am a self-advocate. I am a person on the autism spectrum. I live with my family in Vermont. I actually live in the sticks, in a very small town. I get services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. As mentioned, I work for Green Mountain Self-advocates. We are the self-advocacy organization here in Vermont. I have worked here for over 15 years. And we have 20 plus self-advocacy groups in Vermont. And my job title is the Outreach Director. And my job is to work with our local groups, meet with people with intellectual disabilities and support them to be strong leaders in their groups and in their communities. And I don't want to be too long with my introduction, but I also want to kind of add. My thoughts as given the permission, lack of a better word, you know, to do so. You know, I am glad, Olga, you mentioned the -- how the death -- the measured of Tyre Nichols.

I'm glad you mentioned that because ever since I found out and just seeing what happened to him on the news, it just reinforces, like, how -- and I will talk about this more. Just how difficult it can be to be someone of color And with having multiple identities in a country that has just been plagued with oppression and how it just plays out. And as a Black man with autism, I can say that this -- the death -- the measured of Tyre Nichols just reinforces how I have to sort of look at being a citizen of the United States, I am -- I have to be comfortable to feel uncomfortable with that.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Yeah. Thanks, Max. I thought of you when I read that he had been given 71 commands in 13 minutes. Because we've talked a lot about how hard it would be to respond to commands that were called out to you.

>> MAX BARROWS: Mm-hmm.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Thank you for that. I wonder if you would take just a moment to describe yourself and then I was going to turn to Renee, unless you wanted to say something else about Tyre. About Mr. Nichols.

>> MAX BARROWS: No. I will just say I am a Black man. I am wearing black -- black headphones that are cordless on my head. I am wearing a dark blue collared dress shirt with a dark blue tie with red and white kind of diagonal stripes. I am working from home and behind me is a calendar with a Siberian husky and it is at the wrong month. And I have to adjust that.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: [Laughing].

>> MAX BARROWS: Also behind me is a picture of a woman, an African American woman in spirit. And it's a painting that is very beautiful but a little hard for me to describe because of the patterns. I would have to take a closer look at it. My bad. Other than that, it is just a blank wall. And just maybe you will see some pieces of, like, table behind me. Not pieces as in the table is destroyed. But just parts of stuff leaning against the wall. Nothing that, you know -- nothing that spectacular to look at. But, you know, here I am. Sitting in my home.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Thank you. Thanks so much, Max. And Renee, I wondered if you would introduce yourself. Anything else you want to say other than what I had read and then describe yourself.

>> RENEE LOPEZ: Yeah. Thank you for that introduction, Olga. When I hear the dates, like, I graduated in '82 and '86 and that I worked for 30 years, how old am I?

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: [Laughing].

>> RENEE LOPEZ: For the record, I'm 61. And I'm proud to be this age because it has been a long hard journey. But I have seen a lot of successes and yet I still think we have a lot of work to do. Which is why I am a part of this organization. Anyway, I am in my bedroom. I am in Texas, by the way. Austin, Texas. And behind me is my bedroom. You will see my big princess dresser in the background and my bed with a pink cover on it and gray pillows and paintings and little stuff in the background. I'm in a wheelchair. I use an electric motorized wheelchair. I was born with this disability. It is called, [Name]. It is basically a birth defect. It is not -- there's [indiscernible] unknown. Who knows why. Maybe to do this kind of work.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Exactly.

>> RENEE LOPEZ: My hair is gray and I am wearing a beige head band. And the T-shirt that says thread grills on it which one of my favorite restaurants that is closed down. Sorry, my throat is acting up on me. So I am going to stop right there. Thank you.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Thank you, Renee. And BL, would you like to give us more information about yourself and describe yourself for us?

>> BL: Sure. This is BL. I will do an image description first. I am a light-skinned black Deaf man. I have on a fisherman's beanie with a black/white checkered shirt. Black T-shirt under it. On the right I have a bookshelf with some photos on it. Some kids paintings and drawings and a cup. And a holiday card with the University of Texas logo. That's my team. The kids knew that. So, they gave me that. I also have different pictures and posters behind me. And different photos of quotes in the back. It's pretty cool. The walls are a light gray. I would say light grayish blue wall. And really what's to add. I really have not a lot. But I will say I am the assistant director of multi-culture students programs here at Gallaudet University. I started about eight months ago. So, I moved back to the DMV area after five years in Rochester. Yeah. I'm here and I live in Maryland. Great.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Awesome. Thank you very much. So, I'm going to start with the first question. And I'm going to ask -- this is for each of you to answer. And if it's okay, Max, could you go first? And here's the question. We are here for Part 2 of our webinar series, in part 1 of our series, we discussed how people with disabilities and Deaf people are overpoliced, criminalized, incarcerated, and harmed. And each of you are a leader in your community. What are you seeing in your community about these issues?

>> MAX BARROWS: So, I'm glad that you asked this question. People with disabilities face all the typical risk factors of being victims of crime that all people face. And more. Many people view us as weak and unable to take care of ourselves and often assume they can get away with hurting us because we won't be believed. Low reporting and conviction rates back this up. Perhaps even worse. When an abuser is a family member or someone providing care, we may feel pressure to stay silent for long periods of time. People with disabilities who are immigrants, meanwhile, may be dependent on an abusive relationship for citizenship or immigration status. Black and brown disabled people are subject to police brutality and excessive force more than white people. The violence against us goes back for centuries and it seems to defy all attempts to stop it. Many news reports point out how mental health factors, as well as factors of race and disability are present in the majority of police arrests and police use of force. It is often due to police not knowing how to approach and effectively interact with people who experience disabilities and/or mental health issues. Being trauma sensitive is important, but it goes beyond that. Providers and advocates need to understand intersectionality. When we get services from people who feel comfortable recognizing and responding to racism and ableism, it gives a strong message that we will be believed and listened to. People see us as weak, not being able to defend ourselves. People see us as not able to think straight. So, they take advantage of that. Many disabled people grow up with few friends. They may not have enough experience to know when someone is trying to take advantage of them. People with disabilities experience higher rates of physical and sexual abuse as children than do non-disabled children. Often people assume people with disabilities

are non-sexual or less sexually aware than non-disabled people. This, of course, is not true. Unfortunately, abusive treatment might be all we know and we might not know it is illegal. If for your whole life you are told you are no good because you have a disability, you might -- you know, you might believe you deserve to be abused. This is the case for many people with disabilities. Some people are reluctant to contact police or social services because they fear that these groups will also try to control them rather than provide support in an empowering way. Given this history, it is little wonder that many of us, especially people of color and people who are learning to speak English do not get the services we need to stay safe. And once we become victims of sexual crimes, we may be reluctant to get help because we have already had bad experience with police, doctors, teachers and other professionals who were supposed to help us.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Thanks so much, Max. And it is kind of double bind that people with disabilities and Deaf people are in. So, they are more likely to be victimized and they are also not necessarily going to be safe if they report a crime or if they have interactions with systems. So, thank you so much for laying that out. And Renee, I want to turn to you and ask you, what are you seeing in your area and in the circles that you work?

>> RENEE LOPEZ: Actually, Max covered it pretty well because I think it is universal. Even though I am in Texas and he's in Vermont, everything he just said happens to every person with a disability in the United States and probably even worse in other countries. I do find that a lot of people are afraid to report and the perpetrators often get away with abusing a person with a disability. So, that much is true. There's a lot of people with disabilities that have speech impediments so they can't be understood. Even if they try to get help or call the police, if you have a speech impediment that people cannot understand, you're not going to be able to report. And most of us are not taken seriously. Like Max mentioned, many of us are seen as Having low intellect. Automatically just because you're in a chair. And so, you're treated in a patronizing way. People can be self -- as well because they will use the disability to make themselves feel better. I have run across that quite a bit. And I belong to this group here in Austin called Adapt of Texas, and we are an organization where we find issues that affect people with disabilities and then work with the legislature to see if we can change policies. And mostly it's to get for money. But it is also to change policies. And so, one thing I have found is when we do, like, what we call a -- when we get together to protest, you know, for an action that happened, something very similar to what we did with George Floyd, where everybody got together and had this action, people with disabilities in wheelchairs, we do that, too. Mainly at the Capital. And it infuriates me sometimes that people think we are funny. Look at those funny people over there. Now what are they hollering about? You can't even understand them. And it becomes more of a joke when we are dead serious. And so that can be very disheartening. Or else you hear people saying here they come again. And we're seen as -- we're not taken seriously is the way -- is my experience in my community, especially here in the state Capital of Texas. Because this is where we do our work. So, that has been my experience here.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Thanks so much, Renee. I should mention Renee and Max and I have been working together as part of a BIPOC caucus with Activating Change. And prior to Activating Change with the Vera Institute of Justice. So, I know their work pretty well and

Renee has been doing a lot of work that we'll talk about a little bit more later. But around some of the issues that creates poverty for people with disabilities. The other piece that I wanted to kind of comment on, Renee, is that piece of how ableism -- how people are so ingrained to think a certain way about someone with a disability. And in particular, someone who uses a wheelchair.

>> RENEE LOPEZ: Mm-hmm

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Because it is obvious to them. Where I have dissociative identity disorder and that is a disability that is not apparent to people. And so -- but if I -- and if I tell someone that I have it, which I tend to do professionally, but if I tell someone that I have it, they do start then getting nervous and wondering about me because it's so stigmatized.

>> RENEE LOPEZ: Right.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Anyway, I just kind of wanted to direct a little bit with your experience around how people treat you, the correct all of a sudden that you don't have if -- once they find out that you have a disability.

>> RENEE LOPEZ: That is exactly what happens. It's a loss of correct.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Yep. And BL, I wondered what are you seeing in your community about the overpolicing, criminalization of Deaf people and people with disabilities?

>> BL: One word that comes to mind is neglect. And the impact that neglect has. We think of a person named Rico, for example, he was interrogated by the police. But he did not have an interpreter in that instance. And so, the police went right back and forth and Rico didn't have as to English either. And so, writing back and forth with the police. They were able to use that as a way to charge Rico. Now he has been in prison for a very long time because of that situation. And so one organization called Heard, tried to fight to get him out. But it was definitely an uphill battle and it was not easy. So, we live in a society where it's phonocentric and it is hearing and speaking. And if you don't have the ability to do that you are less than somehow. Associated with lower intellectual abilities. That has become the norm and there's so many different ways that it impacts on the academic level. Where many K-12 Deaf students, especially BIPOC are severely neglected. And that neglect leads to different activities that involve criminalization, drugs, violence, gangs and the like. And so you have that. And the other panelists mentioned domestic violence, sexual violence as other barriers. And 1-4 Deaf women will be more likely -- will experience domestic violence and sexual violence. And I believe for men it is 1-8. And so, it's ingrained. And again, with the reporting that happens as you just mentioned. We don't have access. And the tendency -- we don't typically have the supports in place. Those processes to healing and restorative justice. All that is lacking. It definitely compounds the trauma and traumatic experiences that people face and it becomes a negative stigma as it relates to reporting. And that can be triggering and traumatizing as well. So, as it relate toss the Deaf community, from my own experience as a consultant and trainer, there's definitely a deep struggle to reconcile. For that we live in a Phono centric society. We also perpetuate -- with racism, sexism, classism, all the isms. Those are different barriers we experience. The frameworks for noticing and acknowledging those experiences. For example what Max just mentioned about intersectionality is extremely important. That was created in 1960s by Dr. Crenshaw. Deaf people don't have those deep dive discussions until 2010.

Because is English. And our language is different. Often we are a little bit behind the curve in those instances as it relates to access. That definitely helps our community to identify and disseminate what our experiences actually look like. Navigating that is definitely a challenge. But that is the game that we're in right now.

>> MAX BARROWS: You're muted.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Thank you. [Laughing]. Okay. I want to stay with you for this next question because it ties right into what you were just talking about. In our webinar on the 10th, we talked about how the overpolicing and criminalization and incarceration starts really early. And I also want to note for a second that we're talking about very similar things that are happening in Vermont, in Texas, in Washington, D.C., Maryland area. I'm in Wisconsin. This is clearly systemic. This is not these are bad people here. These are bad people there. This is systemic and clearly part of ableism and racism and audism. It starts really early. Children with dubs or Deaf children are being met with punishment rather than accommodations and support. And we're seeing this especially with BIPOC disabled children and BIPOC Deaf children in schools. There's a study I read recently that showed that -- that talked about -- it was actually a journal that talked about how white kids with disabilities are supported, accommodated. There's kind of a medical approach to supporting them in schools. And then BIPOC are not. Instead, they are getting swept up through zero-tolerance policies and bias and to punishment of disabilities rather than supporting and accommodating them. There's also school security criminalizing BIPOC with disabilities. Labelling kids young as problematic. And people are getting suspended and then expelled from schools. And because you focus on that transformation of K-12 programs and then post-secondary settings, what do you feel is behind these settings for Deaf people and those -- and BIPOC disabled people?

>> BL: So, there's several things happening simultaneously. When we talk about the community itself in general, it's severely neglected, as I mentioned. I mentioned trying to come together, thinking about the isms, audism and phonocentrism. There are other isms that are real in our community. When I work I try to connect all those things. When I give presentations to school for the deaf or any deaf leadership agency, I really talk about how oppression operates. And typically already three functions. Systemic, historic, pervasive. And so, it really shows how it affects our communities. Especially the school for the Deaf, when there was segregation. The last school integrated was the Georgia School For the Deaf and that was in '78, for example. And so, that impact that it has on our community. And when you talk about the fact that many BIPOC Deaf children who may not have language access in their homes. So, they get to go to School For The Deaf where they are constantly criminalized. They are constantly punished. What do you internalize from those experiences? You start to think I am not worth this. I'm not good enough. I don't deserve X, Y, Z opportunities for growth, elevation in life. You start to see that. I saw that with my upbringing with my father. A Black Deaf man who experienced that very thing. He really fell into drugs and alcohol and addiction. And that was ongoing until he was 44 years old. From a teenager to 44 years or about 50 years old. That persisted. So, what's behind all of that? I can say it's a struggle to come together. To really identify the things that are happening all at the same time. And also when we get to that

point, I think is where the healing starts. Because it's consistent. It is constantly there. Yeah, that's what I will say.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Yeah. Thank you, BL. And it reminds me of this video that Max had actually shared with me during a meeting of a security guard holding down a 7-year-old boy with a disability. And yelling at him. In school. And yelling at him and asking him how many times has he been arrested. And really, really -- it was really hard to watch the video, but I couldn't believe this was, like, a 7-year-old. That really kind of puts -- punishment, really punishing people with disabilities, punishing people who are not really able to hear even though they are not being accommodated. As opposed to figuring out what supports someone needs. So, it just kind of stands out to me. Go ahead.

>> BL: That made me think of another experience where one friend of mine who was a Black deaf-blind person. We went to college together. And we were at a house party and the police stormed the house party. And there were two police officers that approached my friend and it was dark outside. So, the police officers approached him and grabbed him. And the guy had the ability to speak. Said I can't see you. Could you please back up. And the police in that moment touched him and they physically abused him. So, I had a friend who was there, who approached the situation, trying to explain it to the officer that hey, he is deaf-blind. The cops did him harm as well. The punishment was ongoing and they weren't even willing to try to communicate. And that happens even on college campuses. Here at Gallaudet University, I used to work at Rochester institute of technical, we explained to the officer you need to make sure you have access with every situation. You have to make sure access is provided. Because they often miss the mark when it comes to that. Typically if that is not in place, violence will occur.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Let me follow up with another question. Which is that's the piece that I kind of wanted to look at a little deeper, if you don't mind. Once people encounter systems, the lack of access, the lack of interpretation for Deaf people, like, how does that play out? What happens? What's the impact of that?

>> BL: Again, you know, violence. Mentally, emotionally, spiritually, physically, violence is going to happen automatically. When you remove access from any situation, that's a given. Violence will occur. And so, like I said, violence will happen. And that's the reason why reporting is not very highly favored within the community. People's lives do change. Their well-being changes. When they're entered into the carceral system, they report something happens, the case isn't really processed appropriately. It's just ongoing. Ongoing violence. And when you think about it, with the lack of access and trying to get justice, you know, you have to have clear communication. Any kind of rehabilitation, supports, anything. It's minimal or minimized. Like I said, the impact is tremendously deep.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Yeah.

>> BL: And unfair.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Yeah. Thank you. So, we're basically painting a picture how all these isms come together and it starts really young. I want to turn to you Renee. This is the way some people come in contact with our systems. Through our schools. And then in other settings and then without access, there can be dire consequences for them. So, another way

that people are marginalized is they are impoverished. And I know through a lot of the work that you have been doing over the years on economic justice for people with disabilities, I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about that work and kind of the ways -- sort of the issues that you have been working on.

>> RENEE LOPEZ: Yeah. You know, one of the things I see that is the worst of all is probably our systemic abuse from our government that keeps people with disabilities oppressed. For starters, for example, people who are getting social security income, SSI, the money is so low that you can't hardly live on it. So, you end up having to live in an apartment that is Section 8. And then you have to have Medicaid. And then you have to be on food stamps and other supplemental things. How can you feel empowered when you don't have enough money to buy food. Someone posted earlier under Q&A if there were any statistics. I happened to look it up this morning so hot off the press. Let's see. The maximum SSI benefit for 2022 was \$845 a month and the year before that was \$794 in 2021. It puts us at the federal -- what they call it? The federal poverty line. But there's been no increase. So, you have to have affordable housing and there's very little affordable housing. And there's even less accessible housing that is affordable. So, many people with disabilities, physical disabilities that want to live in the community don't have an option. The only option is to go either stay with your family or to go live in some institution or nursing home. So -- and then there's no incentive to go to work because you can't make hardly any money. And I have the statistic here -- anyway, I won't -- I don't know what I did with it. But anyway, there's -- it does show that you can only make a certain amount of money. Like, for every 50 cents earned, they take dollar out of your check. There's no incentive to go to work. Really. You would have to make a -- get a job that pays really, really well. Especially here in Austin, it is particularly difficult because the cost of living here, you have to make at least \$2,000 or \$3,000 a month just to live comfortably. And what happens then as well is you end up living in these Section 8 housing where there's a lot of violence. And you're not able to protect yourself. You have to be very careful. I could say this personally because I lived this. I lived this life. It was back in the '80s. But at the time, I was only get 550 in social security and I lived in Section 8 housing where I paid \$75 a month. And I had to -- my neighbors -- not every neighbor. But around that area which was poverty, there was a lot of violence. And there were times bullets went right through my apartment. And there was a lot of drug dealing. Even people with disabilities were doing drug dealing because they have to find a way to supplement the income. And selling drugs was an easy way to do that. You didn't have to go anywhere. And the problem is you are then forced to criminalization.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Right.

>> RENEE LOPEZ: It puts you in a bad situation all the way around. And I really wish that supplemental security income would take a look at their finances, benefits, because they were created in 1972 to help low-income, older and disabled Americans. But the rules are so strict. I'm really good this from my notes. That they have been barely been updated since then. And it is just not enough to help anybody out. And there's not enough places to live. We've just kept oppressed everywhere we go. Very few people -- I was one of the lucky ones able to get out from under that. But I know so many more people that don't. Like BL mentioned, if you are a child with a disability like I was, you are brought up to feel like you are not important at all. That

you have nothing to contribute. That you are never going to get married. You are never going to own a house. You never contribute. All you do is take from the government. When I did go to work, I had people say why are you working? Why don't you stay home and collect a check. And I would say because I don't want to live on \$500 a month. It is those systemic oppressions. And I think it starts primary with the government and SSI. Systems like that because if you can't grow out of it, if you can't get out of it because the rules are so strict, you end up getting oppressed and you can't get out of that situation.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Yeah. And it's funny, I have learned so much about that from you. I know that you have been advocating -- especially since the pandemic because really, like, this housing sector just kind of blew up during the pandemic. And things have gotten worse around affordable housing. And you have been doing quite a bit of advocacy around that. And advocacy around personal care attendants and how much they get paid. I was wondering if you could say a little bit about that. Why is that so important?

>> RENEE LOPEZ: Right now, the disability community with people like myself who live in the community and live independently in our homes, apartments or whatever rely on people like a personal care attendant to come in and help us out with our activities of daily living. But the attendants are only getting paid minimum wage which is \$8.11 an hour. That is just 11 cents more than what they were getting paid three years ago. Who wants to work for that amount of money? Nobody. You could work at McDonalds and making \$15, \$16 an hour flipping pancakes and you can't go into the home and help someone independently. It has reached a crisis to where they are any attendants available. There have been people that are left in their wheelchairs, sitting in their own feces for hours and hours until somebody can get to them to help them. There are people who gave up having to live in the community. They gave up their apartments and are now living in an institution like a nursing home because they can't find anybody to come out to help them. And so, that's -- it has become a huge issue. So, the legislature starts -- well it already started. We are people-first language to go there, once again, to ask for a raise for attendant care because \$8.11 is not going to cut it. We are asking for \$15. To raise the minimum wage to \$15. But even that is not going to cut it because people are getting paid 20 and 21 now. We are falling behind before we even get ahead. I am very passionate about this issue. It is very, very scary to me. If anything happens to my attendant that I have right now, I don't know what I would do, honest to God, if they don't have anybody -- if they can't send anybody to come help me. All the degrees in the world, all my talking, all the webinars, everything. Nothing is going to come in and get me up that morning but that attendant and that is how important that job is. And that is why we are fight so hard for it, even to the point of getting arrested. If that is what we have to do, then that is what we'll do.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Yeah. That was interesting to me when we were in a meeting last month, I think it was, that you were saying you were people-first language some of these protests and that you were people-first language some civil disobedience. And I thought wow that is really amazing. There's a question that came up in the Q&A. I will just ask -- let me know if you feel like you can answer this. It is for you Renee. It is saying you are making an excellent point. As a follow-up question, do we also have to keep our disability community and advocates accountable for enabling the governmental oppression on people with disabilities? Basically,

the people that can be oppressed are the people that are trying to make changes. So, you're basically responsible for that.

>> RENEE LOPEZ: I'm not sure I quite understand what you're saying. Like, when we go out and do -- could you explain that a little bit more, Olga?

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Yeah. What I am hearing in this question I think is -- it might not even be a question. I think it is a comment. Do we also have to keep our disability community and advocates accountable for enabling the government -- enabling governmental oppression on people with disabilities. It feels more like a comment to me than a question. I might be misunderstanding. If this is your question, we can come back to it, if you could kind of clarify a little bit.

>> RENEE LOPEZ: Yeah. I'm not sure what you mean by enabling. I am thinking when I hear that question that you're asking if maybe we are perpetuating our own oppression by what? That's what I'm not sure.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Yeah.

>> RENEE LOPEZ: I understand.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Yeah. I'm not sure I do either. I think if I understood it better, Renee, you would, because I would be able to explain it. Okay. I want to turn to Max. There was something -- here's the connection. In our first webinar we talked about how homeless people are overpoliced. And so -- and I am just kind of summing up the things that we heard from you, Renee. In our past webinar, we were saying that homeless people are being overpoliced. In particular right now one of the things we know going on is the New York City mayor has asked the police -- or has charged the police with identifying homeless people and basically picking them up and doing a forced institutionalization at a hospital for a mental health assessment. And you could see all the problems that that would cause because folks don't understand why police all of a sudden are coming up to them. They are minding their own business, being homeless. You could see how homelessness would be easy to be happy with what you described not being able to have affordable housing. We are putting people in a position where they have no choice but to be homeless. And now different cities, New York is the first one to do it. But other large cities are looking into this. And basically forcing institutionalization for a mental health assessment to people who are homeless. And they are not asking for this. And then you start seeing kind of the way systems can create danger for people. And so, not responding to commands. Not being able to act quickly enough. Not being able to understand what is going on and having reactions to it could be really dangerous for someone who is homeless. And it's just kind of -- and then once they get into the institution, what happens there. It's just a lot of pieces that feels really wrong to me. This is how it all starts. Anyway, that is my outraged recap of your information. Thanks.

>> RENEE LOPEZ: I just wanted to say this real quick, Olga. A good example that I wanted to give is if you are on SSI and you want to marry a person who has a disability that is also on SSI, then they cut your benefits, both of you to where you are living -- unless you were alone. And the point of that is to keep people from getting married and procreating. I think that was the initial reason. But that hand changed in so long. What happens is you end up together with a partner but you have to lie. Just like many people who are gay back in the '50s or '40s had to

lie about who you were and who you were with because of the punishment. And then you are seen as living in seen or you're breaking the law and you're lying to the government. But what can you do? It's the law.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Yeah.

>> RENEE LOPEZ: It does cause criminalization when you oppress people like that.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Yeah. That is a really good point. Thanks, Renee. Max, I'm going to turn to you at this point. And so, I have been -- I noticed that Green Mountain Self-advocates developed a plain language guide to police violence. And I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about why you all thought that was an important thing to develop and what you were hoping to accomplish.

>> MAX BARROWS: So, sometimes it can feel -- it can make me feel that -- sometimes it can make me feel like I am not intelligent enough to participate in a conversation when I don't know what is going on. It has a negative impact on my self-confidence. It is a sign of respect when someone takes the time to make sure they are communicating in a way they are understood. I want to just say many thanks to the Autistic Self-Advocate Network for doing the lion's share on creating a booklet on racism and police brutality in plain language. Rewrote this book in June of 2020 because there were protests all over the country about racism and police violence. We wrote this booklet in plain language so as many people as possible can understand the protests. There is a -- there's a lot to know about rainfall and police violence. The booklet we made was short and we told people that we do not talk about everything in our booklet. We encourage people to learn more. In May of 2020, when George Floyd was murdered, I had already been meeting weekly on Zoom with peer leaders from more than 30 states. And throughout the summer of 2020, we had some tough conversations during the national Zoom meetings. For many, reading our booklet was the first time they have learned about the history of systemic racism in our country. We need to teach the history of discrimination against people with disabilities from diverse cultural backgrounds. There have been too many deaths and ongoing violence against Black and brown people in our country. So, this is a great tool to have frank conversations about how training -- how training alone is not going to make a change. It is not a bad idea to talk to the police. But the real heart of it comes from changing laws and policies. Training alone is not going to solve the issue of police brutality. We need new laws for the police system as a whole on how they patrol and how they interact. These laws must be enforced and the way we can make change is making noise through our legislators, our representatives and all that. And our booklet was a call for disability rights advocates to work to eliminate racism. Until that happens, people with disabilities will never be free. We are at an important part of our movement's history to address both of these societal issues. Because it is hard to know what to do, a lot of people within the disability world are reluctant to talk or think about racism. But we can't ignore this problem. Everyone has to help end racism. No one can fix everything all at once. But there is always a way to help. And written information and discussion must be in plain language, otherwise we are left out.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Right. Thanks, Max. That's really helpful. I want to just check -- because I think we have about 10 minutes left. And I want to just check to see if there are any questions

in the Q&A or in the chat that folks want us to answer. We have support folks that are monitoring all that and they will let us know. I'm not seeing anything. Okay. Let me take a few minutes then. I'm going to move on to our last question. Because I think I want to give people time to do that. Max, let me just start with you. Over the last few years you have been following -- the work that you and I have been doing together over the past few years, I have noticed that you're following kind of what's happening in terms of police violence with Black people and people with disabilities. Would you tell the audience why it is that you're following all these cases?

>> MAX BARROWS: Because it's an issue that is dear to my heart. And whenever these kind of incidences happen, it not only upsets me, but it motivates me to do something about it. And to say something about it. You know, it's funny that you ask that, Olga, because I actually sort of -- before we got into a panel there was somebody who put in chat that they had as an African American mom with some sons, children, I should say or whatever, who are Black. Really hard -- she was heart stricken by what happened to Tyre Nichols. And I responded directly to this person. And I kind of gave a little bit of my -- a feeling about it myself. But I'm going to kind of detail it a little bit after how I responded. But I wanted everyone to know that I am not a victim of police brutality. But as an autistic Black man, I still have high feelings of anxiety whenever I see police. And I get nervous because of the violent, racist things in the world. But not once have any of my service providers even asked me about how I feel when these events occur. I am pretty much on my own to educate myself and sort out the details and now they might impact my life. And I was corrected. Yes. This person has two adult sons.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Yeah.

>> MAX BARROWS: Sorry about that. One is 29 she said.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Yeah.

>> I'm 36 years old. Almost 37. This kind of stuff just impacts me. I personally would have no problem with telling police officers that -- a police officer that I am autistic to help explain myself. But many other people I know may not be able to explain themselves. I may be going too fast for the interpreters. Some of my peers may not have the words at all to explain themselves. Thankfully, I am in an affinity group I meet with once a month. I strongly recommend that your organizations, any organizations that anybody works for create opportunities for the people of color in your organization to participate in affinity groups. I belong to an affinity group with other professional advocates who are people with disabilities and people of color. We welcome the opportunity to tell stories of what we have been through. And we know what it feels like to be so different. We all have more than one identity. And it is a relief to be with others who are on the same page. And I don't feel -- I do not feel as isolated. Affinity groups can be a valuable asset for an organization. You can come to us to know what to do to improve our organization. Each of us knows we can do better at understanding and responding to cultural differences among individuals with disabilities and their families. We as people with disabilities clearly say that we want to live our lives in our own way. Our organizations must consider all the different parts of who we are that make up our identities like gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical capabilities, mental ability. Having more than one identity can be empowering. And I hit on this in the chat to this person as well. This is

more detailed, but I want everyone to hear this. Having more than one identity can be empowering, but it could also be challenging. All of these different parts that make us who we are intersect to make up a person's unique experience. No one should say they cannot, like, help us because we are too complicated. We count on you to help us overcome challenges. We also need our organizations to guide us to feel proud of who we are because by joining together to celebrate our identities, we can strengthen our voices to make everyone's lives better. And I also want to quickly say in, like, ten seconds that anybody out there on this call who has sons or daughters of color or with disabilities or both, I hear you. The impact of what happened to Tyre Nichols hurts me so much as a Black 36-year-old with autism. I don't have to experience police brutality in order for it to hurt me as much as if I did, knowing that this is how people like me are treated in a country and in a world like this. So, my heart is -- I'm sorry to sound graphic but just as split down the middle as anybody out there who has witnessed what happened on video, on the news and even just knowing that that's how people like us are treated.

>> OLGA TRUJILLO: Awesome. Thank you so much, Max. So, we are at the end of our webinar. And I want to thank you each for being on today, for doing the prep work involved, more being so open. And so generous with your experiences and your time. And then I want to remind folks that are on, that have been listening that -- a couple of things. There are questions in the Q&A that we have not been able to answer that we will circle back around and we will take those questions and respond to them. I think we -- I'm not certain -- I was just trying to check. We will post them with the webinar recording and the other related materials that we might have. And then I also wanted to let you know that on February 23rd, we will have part 3 of our series. And we're going to look at kind of what does this mean for your work? And try to provide some practical guidance for the ways in which you can incorporate what we've learned in the first webinar series, which is kind of how the statistics and overrepresentation of people of color with disabilities and Deaf people in our prisons and jails. And every step along the way in our criminal legal system. And then this webinar, where we kind of bring that to life, show you the ways in which people with disabilities and Deaf people are treated. In our section one, we will kind of get into kind of practical guidance on how to move forward with your work. And I want to thank everyone who is supporting us behind the scenes. The interpreters as well and thank you all again for being here.

[Event concluded] [Recording stopped]