

The



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Tired of Being Invisible

*Advocate works
for disabled rights*

BY MINDY COOPER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Nickole Cheron never thought she would dedicate her life as an advocate for those living with a disability, but after experiencing first-hand the challenges faced as a person who uses a wheelchair, she said it was time to give back to her own community.

Although Portland has made great strides to enable equal access and rights for those living with a disability, Cheron, the city's disability program coordinator, said even with the Americans with Disabilities Act, there is a long way to go for justice.

Enacted by Congress in 1990, the ADA established a clear and comprehensive prohibition of discrimination on the basis of disability and gives civil rights protections, similar to those on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age, and religion.

Not only is July Americans with Disabilities Act awareness month, but this week also marks the 22nd anniversary of when the ADA was signed into law by President George H. W. Bush.

Although the impact of the ADA is undeniable, Cheron said government made it a complaint-driven law, which means there is nobody who enforces it other than the federal government.

"So if you are a person with a disability and you are trying to go into a restaurant and you have a service animal and the restaurant says, 'No I'm not going to serve you', You have no one to call," she said. "You can't call the police. Even the city doesn't enforce the ADA. The city complies with it, but they are not enforcers of it."

Cheron sees hope for increased awareness of how people living with a disability are viewed within the American culture.

"I think when we look at different people who are oppressed within our society, people with a disability tend to be invisible," she said. "Part of that is our fear of



Nickole Cheron is an advocate at City Hall for those living with a disability.

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