

An Open Letter from Coreen Brinckerhoff, CEO of CORD



Can we talk about straws, please? I know, I know, the topic is getting tiresome. Just get rid of the single-use plastic straws already; save the poor sea turtles and the environment by ditching plastic straws for something more “environmentally friendly,” such as paper or metal. I get it. I really do. The environment is essential, to put it mildly. I saw the video of the poor turtle getting the straw extracted from its snout. It’s a problem.

But the wholesale banning of plastic straws is not the answer.

That “solution” completely disregards and disrespects a whole portion of our community that relies on plastic straws. Surely at some time in your life, you have seen people with disabilities drinking through straws because they could not bring the cup to their lips. Often, bendiness is critical with these straws so a metal or paper one will not work. Also, paper straws may not hold up well in hot beverages, dissolving and creating a potential choking hazard to the user. People may bite down on metal straws causing injury to themselves. Teeth can be chipped and broken. Metal conducts heat, creating a burning hazard.

Places of public accommodation such as Starbucks, Disney, etc. – which have declared intentions to BAN PLASTIC STRAWS – must continue to provide them upon request as a reasonable accommodation, no questions asked. No questions asked. Sure, put them aside. Don’t leave them out for everyone. But have them available for those that need them. It’s a reasonable accommodation, which makes it the law under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). And people with disabilities do not have to provide their own accommodations, so no, they do not have to bring their own straws.

Don’t we want to include everyone in all aspects of our society? Why would anyone want to exclude any part of our population?

The worst part of the straw debate is that there is a debate at all. It has further marginalized a population of American society that fights every day for equality despite the 30-year old ADA which guarantees equal access.

It’s time to start including all citizens when looking for solutions to problems. Excluding an entire segment, such as people with disabilities, from discussions of societal issues is just unacceptable. We won’t hide in the shadows. You’re going to hear from us, so you may as well get ahead of that and include us from the start.



106 Bassett Lane, Hyannis, MA 02601

508-775-8300 / 1-800-541-0282 (both numbers v/tty)

Fax: 508-775-7022 • www.cordcapecod.org

