



City of Philadelphia

City Council
Chief Clerk's Office
402 City Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19107

Legislation Text

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Honoring and recognizing Stephen F. Gold, Esq. for his pathbreaking achievements in civil rights litigation, which have advanced the movement for disability rights and helped countless people to live with dignity and independence, as well as for his tireless and passionate support for social justice.

WHEREAS, Stephen F. Gold, Esq., has advocated for disability rights in his home city of Philadelphia and throughout the country, won important federal civil rights cases that set precedents for U.S. Supreme Court decisions and subsequent widespread reforms, and remains active in broader advocacy for social justice; and

WHEREAS, Raised in Kensington, Gold is a lifelong Philadelphian, graduating from Central High School, La Salle University, and the University of Pennsylvania Law School; and

WHEREAS, Gold began his legal career as an attorney at Community Legal Services of Philadelphia, a preeminent nonprofit organization providing free civil legal representation to redress poverty and challenge systemic injustice, where he also served as Deputy Director; and

WHEREAS, Widely considered as “the foremost attorney in the Disability Rights Movement,” Gold has primarily focused on ensuring accessibility and autonomy for those with physical and mental disabilities; and

WHEREAS, Gold’s career in the disability rights arena began while he was in private practice, when he supported members of the National Federation of the Blind as they fought against employment discrimination in Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, Gold paved the way for street crossing accessibility across the country, establishing powerful precedent in the 1993 case *Kinney v. Yerusolim*, in which he successfully argued that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) required the City of Philadelphia to make sidewalks wheelchair accessible through the addition of curb cuts, improving the daily mobility of countless people to this day; and

WHEREAS, Gold helped establish a foundational legal right to independent living for people with disabilities in the 1995 ADA rights case *Helen L. v. DiDario*, which provided a right to state-funded care in the most integrated setting. This pioneering success in the fight against discriminatory segregated care for disabled people then led to the landmark U.S. Supreme Court opinion in 1999 in *Olmstead v. L.C.*, which recognized the confinement of people in institutions constitutes illegal discrimination and perpetuates unjust assumptions that people with disabilities are unable to participate in community life; and

WHEREAS, Gold advanced housing justice, helping to obtain more accessible public housing units in 1998 in *ADAPT v. Philadelphia Housing Authority*, which resulted in the increase of scattered-site buildings accessible to people with mobility impairments throughout Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, Gold remedied the longstanding lack of wheelchair access in Philadelphia’s key Center City transit stations through the case, *Disabled in Action of Pennsylvania v. Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority*, which led to the construction of elevators at Suburban Station, 15th Street, and City

Hall SEPTA Stations in 2011; and

WHEREAS, Gold also helped to expand the number of handicap accessible taxi cabs in *Ward vs. Philadelphia Parking Authority*, adding 200 wheelchair-accessible cabs by the end of 2012, and retrofitting all of the City's 1,600 medallion holding taxis by 2016; and

WHEREAS, Gold's litigation and influence extends far beyond Philadelphia in a variety of cases enforcing and extending *Olmstead* rights across the country, otherwise known as *Olmstead* cases, including Medicaid waiver support for eligible people seeking in-home care services and access to support services for those transitioning to community-based care in *Billy A. & Miss. Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities v. Lewis-Payton* in 2008; an increase in the number of prescriptions covered by Home and Community Based Services Medicaid waivers in *Fisher v. Oklahoma Health Care Authority* in 2003; a \$4.3 million allocation in Georgia Medicaid services to reduce the waiting lists for community-based services in *Birdsong v. Perdue* in 2006; adequate disability accommodations in a New Jersey mental institution in *Bonnie S. v. Drew Altman*, and many others; and

WHEREAS, Gold wrote the famous amicus brief "Not Dead Yet" for use in the New Mexico Court of Appeals, in a case against assisted suicide of disabled individuals, thereby helping numerous disability advocacy organizations such as ADAPT, the American Association of People with Disabilities, the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund, the National Council on Independent Living, the United Spinal Association, and more, in yet another famous civil rights case; and

WHEREAS, Gold's accomplishments advocating for disability rights and social justice in various forms extend far beyond the courtroom, ranging from a 2019 arrest for civil disobedience in defense of immigrant rights to his steadfast support and presence at countless rallies, protests and hearings, to his influential information bulletins and personal blog dedicated to disability rights law, "Steve Gold's Treasured Nuggets of Information"; and

WHEREAS, Gold continues to reside in Philadelphia with his wife of more than fifty years, Barbara, a pediatrician and public health advocate; they have two children who have carried on their parents' ethos of service and social change: Russell, an investigative journalist and author focused on energy and climate, and Rachel, an epidemiologist and researcher focused on improving health disparities; Gold's brothers Richard, an attorney and former public official in health and human services, and Larry, a renowned strings arranger and musician, are also Philadelphia residents; and

WHEREAS, In July of 2020, ribbons were cut on a 24-unit fully accessible housing development named after Gold, the Stephen F. Gold Community Residences, furthering and honoring Gold's lifelong work to increase opportunities for independent and integrated living for people with disabilities. The apartments are located in West Philadelphia and were developed by Gold's frequent collaborator Liberty Resources, with funding from the ARC of Philadelphia; and

WHEREAS, Gold won the Philadelphia Bar Association Public Interest Section Andrew Hamilton Award in December of 2016 and was honored by the Public Interest Law Center in October of 2017, setting an example to attorneys and civil rights advocates in Philadelphia for his ceaseless commitment to social justice; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Honors and recognizes Stephen F. Gold, Esq. for his pathbreaking achievements in civil rights litigation, which have advanced the movement for disability rights and helped countless people to live with dignity and independence, as well as for his tireless

and passionate support for social justice.