The Advocates for Human Rights’ Oral Statement on Article 11, CRPD

My name is Gretchen Piper, and I represent The Advocates for Human Rights. We thank the committee for its attention to Article 11, and we request the committee consider the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of mass shootings in the United States.

Every year in the U.S., hundreds of mass shootings occur, resulting in the death, injury and permanent disability of thousands of individuals, and prolonged trauma. People with disabilities are victimized by mass shootings, which fall within the ambit of situations of risk, at a rate at least rate four times that of the general population. They are disproportionately impacted and have unique needs to be taken into account. We request your consideration of four recommendations:

First, we urge the committee to take into account the specialized needs of persons with disabilities in preventing and reducing death, injury and trauma due to mass shootings. States should provide active and appropriate education on personal safety to people with disabilities, their parents in the case of children with disabilities, and any caregivers, teachers and emergency response personnel who may interact with persons with disabilities. Public safety plans must be in place to protect, evacuate and care for individuals with disabilities who survive mass shootings. For example, during a recent mass shooting event, people using wheelchairs were unable to evacuate quickly and were easy targets.

Second, states must take into account the unique psychosocial and physical needs of persons with disabilities after a mass shooting. People may not be able to articulate their needs, leading to an incorrect assumption they do not require additional services. Care providers should conduct a holistic, assumption-free evaluation of survivors with appropriate accommodations and support to ensure they are able to request and receive trauma-informed care that meets their unique needs.

Third, we recommend public education. While the public and media often wrongfully attribute mass shootings to psychosocial disabilities, the reality is that fewer than 5% of mass shootings can be attributed to serious psychosocial disabilities. People with disabilities are more likely to be the victims of gun violence than to perpetrate gun violence. Misassociating the cause of mass shootings perpetuates stigma and fails to address the causes of mass shootings, such as failure to identify warning signs, a perpetrator’s history of domestic violence, inadequate gun laws, and access to high-capacity weapons.

Finally, all persons who experience a mass shooting should be recognized as victims, receive adequate reparations and access to long-term, high-quality, affordable physical and mental healthcare. Survivors are often left with lifelong physical, mental and cognitive impacts and society’s failure to address the injury and trauma of violent experiences such as mass shootings can amplify the challenges of a person’s disabilities.

Thank you.