**E ngā mana, e ngā reo, raurangatira mā**

**Tena koutou katoa**

**Ko Paula Tesoriero ahau**

**ko au te Kaihautu Tika HauAtanga mō te Kāhui Tika Tangata ki Aotearoa.**

**Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.**

**Mauri tangata, Mauri ora**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. It’s really exciting to be here for the launch of the Accessibility Charter.

I am now just over two months into the role as Disability Rights Commissioner where I have a statutory responsibility to protect and promote human rights for people with disabilities. I have been deliberate about listening to people for the first couple of months in the role to help inform my understanding of issues and also to help me firm up my priorities in the role.

In those meetings, it has become clear that New Zealand’s cities are not as accessible as they need to be for a range of users. A number of public buildings remain inaccessible, our public transport systems still sometimes lack adequate wheelchair access and audio and visual information, and people sometimes aren’t able to get around our roads and footpaths as easily as they should. Because of this, I intend to be deliberate and purposeful in strategically advocating on accessibility as an issue, helping to shift the dial for disabled New Zealanders.

Being able to get around our cities freely and independently is integral to being able to participate fully in society; to go to school and work and engage in leisure activities with family and friends. Internationally, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) states that everyone has a right to access the physical environment, facilities, and services on an equal basis with others – and given New Zealand’s progress in implementing the CRPD is being reviewed again in early 2019, this is important to consider.

Accessibility also has potentially major economic benefits for New Zealand as a country, given one in four Kiwis identify as disabled. By making accessibility a priority when building physical spaces including shops, cafes, and restaurants, and delivering accessible services and products, businesses will better serve both people with access needs and their networks and utilise the spending power of a larger, more diverse customer base. As Be. Accessible puts it, good access means customers can spend easily, businesses earn more, and economies are healthier leading to greater wellbeing for all.

So it’s really exciting to see an Accessibility Charter being launched here in Christchurch, particularly given the ongoing rebuild work and the opportunities that brings to continue to make the city more accessible. The charter represents an important opportunity to prove to the rest of New Zealand what can be done in Christchurch and the benefits increased access brings to businesses and communities. It’s really encouraging to see individuals and organisations with a key role in driving Christchurch forward here today signing up and committing to implementing the charter and I look forward to hearing how it progresses.

Thanks again for the opportunity to speak about this important issue. I look forward to connecting with you all and chatting about how we can work together to shift the dial for disabled New Zealanders.