

Paul-Claude Bérubé, LLB, delivered a powerful closing address at the Resilience 2026 conference, shifting the discourse surrounding Multiple Chemical Sensitivity from an ongoing medical debate to an urgent matter of human rights, ethics, and systemic accessibility. M. Bérubé argued that the day's presentations shattered a long-standing, fragile position where society could comfortably observe, document, and discuss MCS without making a stand. He asserted that the accumulation of scientific knowledge has reached a tipping point. The core question for society is no longer what has been learned, but how we should respond.

Mr. Bérubé identified a profound, unsustainable gap between the evolution of scientific understanding and the stagnant daily realities of those living with MCS. While research models have adapted to better identify the limits of traditional analytical tools, the actual conditions in which people attempt to work, travel, and access services remain largely unchanged. This gap manifests daily while entering a grocery store, boarding public transit, or visiting a doctor.

Mr. Bérubé advocated for a fundamental shift away from the traditional medical model toward a human rights framework. The medical model allows institutions to indefinitely delay protective choices under the guise of waiting for absolute scientific certainty. Conversely, a rights-based framework operates on observable, real-life impacts and functional limitations. Because MCS creates immediate, documented barriers to employment, housing, and healthcare, it legally falls within the scope of protection against discrimination. Mr. Bérubé highlighted that the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the Quebec Human Rights and Youth Rights Commission have already recognized MCS as a disability requiring accommodation. Action, therefore, is justified the moment a disadvantage is observed, meaning society must stop waiting for scientific consensus and start responding to human reality.

Furthermore, Mr. Bérubé redefined "accessibility" to encompass the invisible components of the built environment. He criticized the narrow, conventional view of accessibility that focuses solely on visible architectural design, such as wheelchair ramps or automated doors. True accessibility requires not just the physical ability to enter a space, but the capacity to safely remain and function within it. Under this expanded definition, environmental features like fragrance-free policies, source control of volatile organic compounds, and low-emission building materials must be recognized as core, baseline requirements of institutional accessibility, designed to accommodate humans. Mr. Bérubé concluded that the framework for change already exists; what is missing is the institutional willingness to scale up proven localized solutions into predictable, proactive, and permanent systemic structures.