

Establishing Disability History Awareness Initiatives – *A Roadmap for States & Territories*

This toolkit is a product of an ODEP Alliance with the National Association of Governor's Committees (NAGC) and is designed to enhance public understanding of disability history.

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Disability History Initiatives – An Introduction

People of all races, classes, and cultures have disabilities. Currently, twenty percent of the American public lives with one or more disabilities, and a person may become disabled at any point during their lifetime. Yet despite the number of people with disabilities in our country, many are unaware of the rich history of the disability movement.

One effective strategy for advancing the rights of people with disabilities is to establish a Disability History Awareness Initiative at the state or territory level. By passing legislation celebrating disability history, state legislatures can help their citizens learn from the successes of past and present disability activists who have worked to make our country more inclusive. Such celebrations enliven people's understanding and appreciation for the diversity of our country and for people with disabilities.

Why Celebrate Disability History?

Individuals with disabilities have played a key role in both creating and influencing our nation's history. And their efforts can help us understand the impact of advocacy on landmark legislation.

One notable disability rights champion is Ed Roberts. Through his activism, Roberts initiated and invigorated the Independent Living Movement. The movement began mostly at the University of California, Berkeley where Roberts attended and demanded comparable living and learning accommodations.

The life and work of Justin W. Dart, Jr. is a further testament to activism and the legislative process. Dart is often referred to as the "Father of the Americans with Disabilities Act." An entrepreneur turned activist, Dart fought against the discrimination imposed upon people with disabilities, African-Americans, and gays and lesbians. While chairman of the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, Dart worked to unite people with all different types of disabilities behind one singular cause – an effort that succeeded in the disability movement gaining critical mass. Because of this activism, Congress passed the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990.

Disability History Awareness Initiatives are about recognizing the efforts of people with disabilities in our nation's past. However there are other opportunities for states and localities to celebrate present and future opportunities for people with disabilities. As an example, National Disability Employment Awareness Month, which occurs every October, presents an opportunity for states to acknowledge the many workers with disabilities who

strengthen and diversify our nation's workforce. By observing this month, states can focus on ways to help people with disabilities be more included in the workplace.

Recognizing disability history and the need for disability employment awareness is a step towards eliminating the stereotypes, ignorance, and other barriers that hinder universal inclusion in the workplace and in our society.

About This Toolkit

Many states and territories already have Disability History Awareness Initiatives in place. Other states that want to take this step can model proposed legislation after what has already been passed in these states.

This document is designed to assist states that have not yet passed legislation related to Disability History Awareness. It features strategies and suggestions for mobilizing public support and passing the necessary legislation. The kit also contains sample language for such legislation and the contact information for those who have helped other states succeed in their endeavors.

State and Territory Legislative Systems

Prior to pursuing passage of a Disability History Awareness Initiative in your state or territory, it is important to understand the mechanics of legislative systems. The part of a state or territory government responsible for making laws is different in each state or territory. Some states have legislatures or assemblies, and most have two “houses” or “chambers.” Regardless of which state or territory you live in, your government will have a guide to that branch of the government which gives information about how laws are made.

The governor serves as the head of the executive branch of state or territory government. The governor has the power to veto bills passed by the legislature and is also responsible for signing bills into law after they pass in both houses. The governor can write executive orders that, in most territories and states have similar effect as laws and do not require any action by the legislature to go into effect. This is a general description of how state and territory government works. However, each is different and can vary greatly. For more information, look up your government’s webpage for more accurate descriptions of how the legislative and executive branches work.

The Basic Legislative Process: How a Bill Becomes a Law

There are two main ways to get a Disability History Awareness Initiative established in your state or territory. The first is to pass a law requiring schools to teach it. The second is to persuade your governor to sign an executive order requiring the same thing. In addition to the information here, it is important to read about how your legislature or assembly passes proposed legislation. The following statement is a general overview of how states and territories pass laws.

- Once a proposed piece of legislation called a “bill” is introduced into the legislature, it goes through a review and discussion process in a committee. Advocates and opponents testify for or against the bill, sometimes making recommendations for modifications called “amendments.” The committee discusses the bill and sometimes modifies it. The committee then usually chooses to pass the bill out of committee for discussion and debate of the entire house or chamber.
- That house debates and sometimes amends the bill before approving it to be sent to the second house or disapproves it removing it from consideration entirely.
- If passed, the second house goes through the same process of committee review, testimony by proponents and opponents, debate, possible amendment, and then passage to the full house for discussion and debate. If they pass the bill with changes from the first house’s version of the bill, a committee with members of both houses meets to discuss and compromise on the bill. If they agree on a final version, the legislation is sent to both houses for what is usually a final vote.
- The bill approved by both houses is sent to the governor for signature or veto. A veto is when the governor disapproves of the bill and stops it from becoming a law. If a bill is vetoed, one or both houses may be able to override the veto by a majority vote. (Note: While “majority vote” procedures vary from state to state, this usually entails more than half the legislative body voting to override the veto.)

The second way to establish a Disability History Awareness Week or Month in your state or territory is to persuade your governor to sign an executive order. Some states and territories’ legislatures or assemblies have an option to override an executive order. Check with your governor’s office to learn how that works.

Basic Etiquette Tips on Working with your State & Territory Legislators

I. Communicating with your Legislator through writing

Suggested Content

- Keep it brief. Be as brief as possible, but don't sacrifice clarity and completeness. Two pages is a maximum but one page is best. Use your own words; do not use form letters.
- Identify yourself. Let your legislators know that you live and/or work in their district.
- Keep it focused. Limit the correspondence to one subject. Otherwise, you decrease the impact of your concerns and complicate your legislator's efforts to act.
- Get to the point. State your purpose at the outset and use the remainder of the letter to expand your views. Be constructive suggesting alternatives or better solutions, if possible. A few strong, well thought out points will be more influential than a long laundry list of reasons.
- Use facts. Issues you write about may be emotion-laden, but beware of filling your message with nonfactual information. It will make your legislator less willing to consider your point next time. Base your concerns on data, emerging trends, and/or an apparent need.
- Relate it to home. Emphasize how your idea will affect your legislator's own constituency and/or school districts. Give facts and illustrations - use your own knowledge and experience to inform the legislator. Legislators seldom change their decisions because of a philosophical argument but well-reasoned examples carry tremendous weight.
- Provide background as needed. Don't assume that a legislator is as well informed as you about this issue. A legislator can't keep abreast of everything. Explain the situation, what you think, and why.
- Make specific recommendations.
- Keep it positive. Your attitude is important. A polite, positive-sounding letter is more likely to impress than one that is negative, rude, or threatening. Avoid being antagonistic. Point out the benefits of your position.

- Close with a friendly appeal.
- Allow for follow-up. Include contact information and offer to act as a resource should the legislator (or staff) have questions or need additional information. Where appropriate, indicate in the letter that you will follow up with a phone call.

Format and Process

- Correct address. Use the correct name and address for your legislator.
- Follow etiquette. Addressing correspondence to legislators requires particular etiquette. Every legislator is called "Honorable" on the envelope and inside address. In the salutation, address house members as "Dear Representative _____" while senators are called "Senator _____." Spell the name correctly. During a legislative session, send correspondence to their office; otherwise send to their legislative office address.
- Return address information. For letters, be certain that your name and address are on the envelope and letter.
- Reference bills by number. Refer to all bills by name and number when possible.
- Write legibly or type. Make sure to use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Do not depend on spell check or grammar check to catch all errors. Read through your letter a few more times before sending it to make sure it makes sense and is grammatically correct.
- End cordially. Thank them for their help and consideration – "Sincerely," is an appropriate closing.
- Follow up thanks. Send a note of appreciation if your legislator supports your issue or a note of respectful disappointment if they do not support the issue. If they send information you request, also send a note of thanks.
- Don't give up. To be truly effective, sending more than one letter during a session is a good idea.

II. Using E-Mail

E-mail can be an easy and effective tool for communicating with legislators. The tips above for letters also generally apply to sending e-mails. In addition, e-mails should:

- Avoid informal language. E-mail to a legislator should be treated as seriously as a traditional (snail-mail) letter. Resist the temptation to use the informal language and symbols often associated with e-mail communications.
- Never use impolite language or make "demands."
- Include your full address and zip code. Make sure the text of your e-mail includes your full name and street address, including zip code. Many legislative offices at the federal level screen e-mails for address information identifying the sender as a constituent. E-mails that may appear to come from outside the district are unlikely to be read and might be blocked by filtering programs.
- Use a professional typeface. Avoid using colors and creative fonts. In most situations, it is best to stick to using black, well-known fonts like Times New Roman and Arial.

III. Do's and Don'ts of Advocating your Cause

- Do establish your agenda and goals before contacting your legislator. Do your background research and wait to contact your potential ally until you are confident discussing your idea.
- Do be careful not to get too ambitious. Bring up ideas for the bill that are absolutely essential to your agenda, but be sure to keep your demands reasonable. Be willing to compromise from the beginning.
- Do make sure your legislator knows people who are affected by the bill or issue. Visit his or her website to get an idea of what he or she supports, and see if these positions mesh well with your advocacy agenda.
- Do be honest, direct, positive and brief – know your facts.
- Do meet and talk with legislator's staff – they are there to keep their legislator informed on the issues.
- Do remember to write your legislator after a visit or action on a piece of legislation.
- Don't forget that there are other issues or problems that your legislator is working on.

- Don't hesitate to admit it when you don't know all the facts, but always indicate your willingness to find out.
- Don't press for results during your first visit.
- Don't be offended in the event of a cancelled appointment with a legislator – things are unpredictable and hectic during session.
- Do write out a one-page statement for your legislator or the press to use in getting out the facts on an issue. Provide facts that tell “who, what, where, when, and why.”

Example of a Written Appeal for Disability History Initiative

On the next page is an example of a written appeal to your legislator to get Disability History Awareness Week established in your state or territory.

Note that it is brief, concise, polite, and no longer than one page.

This letter incorporates the tips provided above and can be a basis for your one-page statement outlining your agenda.

Jane Doe
1234 Fake Avenue,
City, State, Zip code

The Honorable John Smith,
(State or territory) Senate
P.O. Box 5555
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Senator Smith:

My name is Jane Doe, and I live in the district you represent. I write you today in support of creating legislation to establish Disability History Week. Throughout history, people with disabilities have made amazing contributions to our country, but so many of these accomplishments go unrecognized. Over ### people in our state or territory live with disabilities, and by helping to establish a Disability History Awareness Week, you would be doing a service to these men, women, and children and to the rest of your constituents.

Many other states, such as Virginia, Washington State, North Carolina, and Vermont have passed legislation in favor of Disability History Awareness Week and Month to celebrate their citizens with disabilities. I encourage you to take steps to follow their lead and make our state an example of diversity appreciation in our country.

I, and many more of your constituents, support the establishment of a Disability History Week or Month during the month of October, which is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. During this celebratory week, we support the integration of disability history into public school curriculums. Often, students with disabilities are separated from their peers because children do not understand that disability does not preclude a person from personal achievement and social integration. Introducing acceptance and disability rights earlier in the education of our children would lead to a better future for both them and their peers with disabilities.

Disability is absolutely under the umbrella of diversity, however many universities and diversity celebration groups do not recognize disability like they do race, gender, and sexual orientation. By helping to establish a Disability History Awareness Week, you will be making a contribution to promoting tolerance, acceptance, and social integration in our great state or territory.

For more information on Disability History Week, possible curriculum ideas, and its success in other states, feel free to visit <http://disabilityhistoryweek.org>. For follow-up questions, you can reach me at thisismyemail@emailclient.com or (555)555-5555.

Thank you for your service,
Jane Doe

Strategies for Advocating for Disability History Awareness

Several states and territories have successfully advocated for governors executive orders and legislation to establish a requirement that K-12 schools teach about disability history every year. The following pages provide information on the strategies and tactics employed by these states. Also included is contact information for individuals involved with the effort who can answer questions.

I. Delaware

Background

[Delaware's legislature](#) passed a resolution in 2009 encouraging K-12 schools to provide instruction and hold events focusing on disability history, people with disabilities, and the disability rights movement during October.

The [Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens](#) decided having disability history awareness taught in K-12 schools would be positive for the students with disabilities as well as those without disabilities. They approached two legislators about introduction of a bill to mandate instruction but were told schools do not like mandates and that getting a bill passed would be difficult. They opted for a legislative resolution that both houses would pass declaring October as disability awareness month and encouraging schools to include instruction in their curriculum. [Wendy Strauss](#), a member of the [Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens](#), met with the head of the Delaware [Department of Education](#), the Director of the [Special Children's unit](#), teachers union, superintendents' organization and the governor. Strauss went to the governor to explain the intent of the resolution. She got supportive comments from all but the superintendants' organization, who gave no comment. The resolution was passed by both houses without extra testimony from people from other organizations. Because the resolution is only good for two years, they will be working again next session to pass another or possibly pass a bill. Other organizations they will try to partner with include the [Developmental Disabilities Council](#), [State Council for Persons with Disabilities](#), and the Governor's Advisory Council.

After the resolution was passed, a resource booklet was developed and placed in 10 locations across the state. It was also available on CD.

For more information contact [Wendy Strauss](#), Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens (GACEC), 516 West Loockerman Street, Dover, DE 19904, phone: 302-739-4553, email: wstrauss@gacec.k12.de.us.

Delaware's Disability History Awareness Resolution

The text for Delaware's disability history awareness resolution reads as follows:

House Concurrent Resolution proclaiming the month of October to be Disability History and Awareness Month and encouraging all Delaware schools to provide instruction and events related thereto.

WHEREAS, an estimated 115,000 Delaware residents, approximately 15% of the State's population age 5 and over, have a disability; and

WHEREAS, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that Delaware served 18,857 students under the Individuals with Disabilities Act during the 2005-2006 school year; and

WHEREAS, research has shown that students with disabilities experience greater academic and social challenges than non-disabled students; and

WHEREAS, the General Assembly finds that in order to ensure the full inclusion of all people into society, there is a need to increase public awareness of the history of disabilities and the disability rights movement; and

WHEREAS, the month of October is recognized nationally as Disability Employment Awareness Month; and

WHEREAS, the General Assembly finds that integrating disability history in the State's education system, from kindergarten to grade twelve, during the month of October will help increase awareness and understanding of the contributions that people with disabilities have made to our state, county and the world; and

WHEREAS, the General Assembly finds that recognizing October as 'Disability History and Awareness Month' and encouraging Delaware schools to include to instruction and events focusing on disability history, people with disabilities and the disability rights movement will increase respect for and acceptance of people with disabilities.

NOW, THEREFORE:

BE IT RESOLVED by the House of Representatives of the 145th General Assembly, with the concurrence of the Senate, that the month of October is hereby declared to be 'Disability History and Awareness Month' in this State.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the House of Representatives and Senate of the 145th General Assembly hereby encourage all Delaware schools annually during the month of October to provide instruction and events focusing on disability history, people with disabilities and the disability rights movement, which may include supplementing existing lesson plans, holding school assemblies and hosting guest speaker presentations.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that upon passage a suitably prepared and duly authenticated copy of this resolution be forwarded to the Secretary of the Delaware Department of Education and the Superintendent of each of Delaware's public school districts and charter schools.

This concurrent resolution proclaims the month of October to be "Disability History and Awareness Month" in Delaware and encourages all Delaware schools annually during the month of October provide instruction and events focusing on disability history, people with disabilities and the disability rights movement.

II. Kansas

Background

Alumni from the [Kansas Youth Leadership Forum \(YLF\)](#) , an organization that works to empower youth with disabilities, initiated the effort to have legislation about Disability History Awareness. The disability history awareness issue came from the [National Collaboration on Work and Disability/Youth](#) and a fact sheet issued by the [Office of Disability Employment Policy \(ODEP\)](#) about disability history and the importance of teaching children about the contributions of people with disabilities. This issue was used in debate during the mock legislature experience during two of the YLFs. Delegates decided they wanted to work on passage of a real bill in the Kansas Legislature.

The [Kansas Youth Empowerment Academy](#), the organization who coordinates the YLF, used funds from a Qualitative Use of Independent Living Title 7B (QUILT) grant to help the task force meet, learn about advocacy, plan their strategy, and distribute information to others about the testimony and hearings as well as to help write letters of support to the legislature. Task force members talked to family, friends, and neighbors about legislation to garner their support.

[Senator Vicki Schmidt](#) became their ally in the Senate and helped get the bill introduced and provided continuous support along the way. The alumni from the YLF gave testimony in both the Senate and House and contacted legislators asking for their support and answering questions. When the bill was stuck in the final stages of the session, Senator Schmidt found a bill that could be used to move the issue forward for a final vote. The bill was signed into law in 2009. It requires K-12 schools to include disability history in their curriculum. The [Kansas Department of Education](#) is developing information for use by teachers for this curriculum.

For more information contact [Ms. Carrie Greenwood](#), Program Coordinator, Kansas Youth Empowerment Academy (KYEA), PO Box 475, Topeka, KS 66601, phone: 785-215-6655, email: carrieg@kyea.org.

Kansas's Disability History Awareness Bill

The text for Kansas's disability history awareness bill is as follows:

Senate Bill No. 41

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Kansas:

K.S.A. 2008 Supp. 72-7535 New Sec. 3. (a) The state board of education shall designate a period of time each school year as a time for disability history and awareness. (b) The state board of education shall develop objectives and guidelines for disability history and awareness, for all grade levels, within the existing curriculum for history, social studies or other appropriate subject matter curriculum. The components of disability history and awareness may include, but not be limited to, the events and time lines relating to the development and evolution of services provided to individuals with disabilities and information relating to the contributions of specific individuals with disabilities, including the contributions of acknowledged national leaders. (c) The goals of disability history and awareness instruction include:

- 1.) Encouraging the better treatment of individuals with disabilities, especially for school-age children.
- 2.) Increasing attention to the prevention of bullying or harassment of students with disabilities.
- 3.) Encouraging the development of self-esteem in individuals with disabilities.
- 4.) Encouraging individuals with disabilities to obtain a postsecondary education which will empower such individuals to enter the workforce and contribute to their communities.
- 5.) Reaffirming the local, state and federal commitment to providing an equal opportunity for, and the full inclusion in society of, all individuals with disabilities.

(d) Each school district shall include disability history and awareness within the district's curriculum as deemed appropriate by the district.

New Sec. 4. Each postsecondary educational institution is encouraged to conduct and promote on its campus activities which provide education, understanding and awareness of individuals with disabilities, disability history and awareness.

Sec. 6. This act shall take effect and be in force from and after its publication in the statute book.

III. Maryland

Background

A 2009 Maryland initiative encouraged passage of a law that required the governor to proclaim October as Disability History and Awareness Month and encouraged universities and county boards of education to incorporate instruction about disability history into their curricula. The bill did not pass, but the governor signed an executive order requiring state agencies to observe Disability History and Awareness month during October. It also required the Department of Disabilities to take steps to increase public awareness of the history of disabilities and the disability rights movement, as well as the Maryland State Department of Education to encourage and assist local boards of education to provide instruction in the history of disabilities, people with disabilities, and the disability rights movement during the observance of Disability History and Awareness Month. Further, the executive order encouraged the Board of Regents of Maryland to promote activities at each institution that provide education, awareness, and understanding of disability history, people with disabilities, and the disability rights movement.

For more information contact [The Dandy-Walker Alliance, Inc](http://www.dandy-walker.org/) (<http://www.dandy-walker.org/>) or contact George P. Failla, Jr., Esq., Deputy Secretary, Maryland Department of Disabilities, 217 East Redwood Street - Suite 1300, Baltimore, Maryland 21202, phone: 410-767-3665, www.mdod.maryland.gov.

Maryland's Disability History Awareness Law

The text of Maryland's executive order reads as follows:

Executive Order 01.01.2009.10

Maryland Disability History and Awareness Month

WHEREAS, The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 was enacted to end disability-based discrimination, and to promote inclusion, full participation, economic self-sufficiency, and equality of opportunity for all people with disabilities;

WHEREAS, In 2000, the United States Census Bureau listed 845,345 people with disabilities out of a total population of 5,296,486 in the State;

WHEREAS, Maryland families have often been enriched by one or more members' life experience with disability;

WHEREAS, The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services reported that, during the fall of 2006, the State served 106,739 students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act;

WHEREAS, Students with disabilities encounter social challenges in academic settings and community-based activities;

WHEREAS, Increasing public awareness of the history of disabilities and the disability rights movement will help to include more fully people with disabilities into society;

WHEREAS, In 1945, Congress designated the first week in October as "National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week" and in 1988, changed the name to "National Disability Employment Awareness Month" and directed that appropriate ceremonies take place to enlist public support for, and interest in, the employment of workers with disabilities who are otherwise qualified;

WHEREAS, The University of Maryland recognized Disability Awareness Month in October 2008 and sponsored programming designed to recognize social and cultural contributions made by people with disabilities and to increase campus awareness of the changes needed to create equal opportunities and an inclusive environment; and

WHEREAS, Proclaiming and observing a Disability History and Awareness Month will increase public awareness and respect for people with disabilities in Maryland and beyond.

NOW, THEREFORE I, MARTIN O'MALLEY, GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF MARYLAND, BY VIRTUE OF THE AUTHORITY VESTED IN ME BY THE CONSTITUTION AND THE LAWS OF MARYLAND, HEREBY PROCLAIM THE FOLLOWING EXECUTIVE ORDER, EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY.

A. State of Maryland Executive Branch agencies shall annually observe October as Disability History and Awareness Month.

B. The Department of Disabilities shall take steps to increase public awareness of the history of disabilities and the disability rights movement, including the following:

(1) Collaborate with other State agencies that serve people with disabilities to coordinate activities and events throughout the State which draw attention to and increase public awareness of the history of disabilities and the disability rights movement;

(2) Promote and foster activities around the State that are sponsored by other State departments or other organizations, consistent with the goals of Disability History and Awareness Month; and

(3) Provide information and other assistance to the State of Maryland Executive Branch agencies, the Maryland State Department of Education, the University System of Maryland, Morgan State University, Saint Mary's College of Maryland, the sixteen public community colleges, and local governments in meeting the goals of this Executive Order.

C. The Maryland State Department of Education shall encourage and assist local boards of education to provide instruction in the history of disabilities, people with disabilities, and the disability rights movement during the observance of Disability History and Awareness Month. County boards are encouraged to incorporate such instruction by measures such as:

(1) Supplementing existing lesson plans;

(2) Holding school assemblies;

(3) Hosting disability-focused film festivals;

(4) Seeking assistance from individuals with disabilities or knowledgeable guest speakers from the disability community;

(5) Organizing other appropriate school activities; and

(6) Recognizing at the local level the accomplishments of students and citizens who have life experience with disabilities.

D. The Boards of Regents of the University System of Maryland and Morgan State University, the Board of Trustees of St. Mary's College of Maryland, and the boards of trustees of the sixteen public community colleges are encouraged to promote activities at each institution that provide education, awareness and understanding of disability history, people with disabilities, and the disability rights movement.

IV. New York

Background

Efforts in the State of New York have been working toward passage of two pieces of Disability History legislation. The first calls for designating a day or week for celebrating the history, the accomplishments, and the successes of people with disabilities (which publicly highlights and permanently commemorates people with disabilities). The second piece of legislation calls for New York State to include disability history and awareness education in the K-12 curriculum.

Several strategies are being pursued by People Inc. First, they developed a [Disability History Week](#) website that links to the Museum of Disability website where teachers' resources can be accessed. Included in the teacher's resources are free K-12 disability history and awareness curricula, along with supplemental supporting information and resources. These curricula were developed by educators and align with national and New York State learning standards. Although the Museum's curriculum is not tied to any legislation, it has been used as a selling point as it is a free and easy-to-implement resource available to schools.

The group also maintains a Disability History Week (DHW) website to include the current New York State legislation, a list of supporters, and the status of other states' legislative efforts. The website is used as a vehicle to keep supporters informed both on a state-wide and national level.

Organizers also formed the Western New York (WNY) DHW coalition (comprised of supporting WNY organizations and advocacy groups). The purpose of the coalition is to have a core group of advocates that will communicate with their legislators and urge them to support the legislation. Coalition member organizations have and continue to organize and execute disability history and awareness celebrations. People Inc takes a lead role in communicating with coalition members and providing leadership and support to the coalition. And members celebrate disability history week.

Three coalitions have been established throughout the state (representing Western New York, Albany and New York City areas). Currently the Western New York DHW Coalition is the most active and broad-based. In 2010, there will be both private and public celebrations during the month of October throughout WNY. People Inc. and the Museum of disABILITY History have developed supporting promotional materials,

including posters, information about person first language, and more. The WNY DHW coalition meets monthly all year long.

The position of Disability History Week Coordinator was created and supported by People Inc. This person takes a lead role in presenting and promoting the disability history week initiative by giving presentations to interested individuals and groups. The DHW Coordinator has also assumed a lead role in keeping the Western New York DHW Coalition functioning, by facilitating monthly meetings, communicating pertinent information, and organizing events and activities.

Although a day has been permanently designated, supporters in New York State will continue to celebrate the third week in October as “Disability History Week.” The goal for 2011 is to re-introduce curriculum legislation and strategically engage supporters in order to get the legislation on the respective Senate/ Assembly Education Committees’ agendas passed and signed into law. The bill that will be introduced is an amended version of previous legislation focusing on disability *awareness* in elementary schools (that has not been successfully implemented). The amended version will expand the instruction to include *disability history* and will also include *middle and high school* grades.

For more information contact Catherine Herrick, People Inc., 1219 North Forest Rd., Williamsville, NY 14231, phone: (716) 817-7297, email: cherrick@people-inc.org.

New York's Disability History Awareness Bill

The text of New York's disability history awareness bill reads as follows:

AN ACT to amend the education law, in relation to instruction on the history of people with disabilities.

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, REPRESENTED IN SENATE AND ASSEMBLY, DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

Section 1. Subdivisions 1 and 3 of section 801 of the education law, as amended by chapter 574 of the laws of 1997, are amended to read as follows:

A 1. In order to promote a spirit of patriotic and civic service and obligation and to foster in the children of the state moral and intellectual qualities which are essential in preparing to meet the obligations of citizenship in peace or in war, the regents of The University of the State of New York shall prescribe courses of instruction in patriotism, citizenship, and human rights issues, with particular attention to the study of the inhumanity of genocide, slavery (including the freedom trail and underground railroad), the Holocaust, and the mass starvation in Ireland from 1845 to 1850, AND THE HISTORY OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, TO BE CONCENTRATED DURING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO THE THIRD FULL WEEK OF OCTOBER, to be maintained and followed in all the schools of the state. The boards of education and trustees of the several cities and school districts of the state shall require instruction to be given in such courses, by the teachers employed in the schools therein. All pupils attending such schools, over the age of eight years, shall attend upon such instruction. similar courses of instruction shall be prescribed and maintained in private schools in the state, and all pupils in such schools over eight years of age shall attend upon such courses. If such courses are not so established and maintained in a private school, attendance upon instruction in such school shall not be deemed substantially equivalent to instruction given to pupils of like age in the public schools of the city or district in which such pupils reside.

A 3. The regents shall determine the subjects to be included in such courses of instruction in patriotism, citizenship, and human rights issues, with particular attention to the study of the inhumanity of genocide, slavery (including the freedom trail and underground railroad), the Holocaust, and the mass starvation in Ireland from 1845 to 1850, THE HISTORY OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, TO BE CONCENTRATED DURING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO THE THIRD FULL WEEK OF OCTOBER, and in the history, meaning, significance and effect of the provisions of the constitution of the

United States, the amendments thereto, the declaration of independence, the constitution of the state of New York and the amendments thereto, and the period of instruction in each of the grades in such subjects. They shall adopt rules providing for attendance upon such instruction and for such other matters as are required for carrying into effect the objects and purposes of this section. The commissioner shall be responsible for the enforcement of such section and shall cause to be inspected and supervise the instruction to be given in such subjects. The commissioner may, in his discretion, cause all or a portion of the public school money to be apportioned to a district or city to be withheld for failure of the school authorities of such district or city to provide instruction in such courses and to compel attendance upon such instruction, as herein prescribed, and for a noncompliance with the rules of the regents adopted as herein provided.

S 2. This act shall take effect immediately

V. Virginia

Background

A group of alumni from the [Youth Leadership Forum](#) worked on a [joint resolution](#) to establish a [Disability History and Awareness Month](#), which was subsequently introduced and passed in February 2009 by the Virginia General Assembly. October is now officially Disability History and Awareness Month in the State of Virginia. The alumni from the Youth Leadership Forum and [Partners in Policymaking](#), a Virginia-based organization that teaches self-advocacy skills to people with developmental disabilities, will be working with the [Virginia Department of Education](#) to develop resources and expand existing curriculum models to include disability history.

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Virginia's Disability History Awareness Joint Resolution

The text of Virginia's disability history awareness joint resolution reads as follows:

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 321

Designating the month of October, in 2009 and in each succeeding year, as Disability History and Awareness Month in Virginia.

Agreed to by the Senate, February 4, 2009

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 20, 2009

WHEREAS, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 was founded on four principles: inclusion, full participation, economic self-sufficiency, and equality of opportunity for all people with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, according to the United States Department of Commerce Bureau of the Census, disabilities affect one-fifth of all Americans, 1 in 10 has a severe disability, and the growth in the number of people with disabilities is expected to accelerate in the coming decades due to the aging of the population; and

WHEREAS, the Bureau also reports that about 9 million people of all ages have disabilities so severe that they require personal assistance to perform everyday activities, and about 80 percent of primary caregivers are relatives, and nearly half of the primary caregivers live with the person with a disability; and

WHEREAS, the Center for Personal Assistance Services estimated in 2005 that “962,000 people in Virginia have a disability, or 14.1 percent of the population age 5 and over,” and that “an estimated 172,000 people, or 2.5 percent of the population age 5 and over, have difficulty performing self-care activities commonly referred to as Activities of Daily Living, such as dressing, bathing, or getting around inside the home”; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Department of Education’s 2006 Child Count reported that Virginia served 172,704 students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; and

WHEREAS, research has shown that students with disabilities encounter more difficulty being accepted by their peers, making friends, and becoming involved in school and community-based activities and clubs than nondisabled students; and

WHEREAS, to ensure the full inclusion of people with disabilities into society, it is necessary to increase public awareness, knowledge, and understanding of disabilities, the etiology of disabilities, and the rights of disabled persons; and

WHEREAS, October is recognized as National Disability Employment Awareness Month by the United States Department of Labor and as National Disability Awareness Month by the United States Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and

WHEREAS, designating October as Disability History and Awareness Month in Virginia will increase public awareness and respect for persons with disabilities, inform the public concerning their many contributions to society, encourage health promotion to increase community awareness of the needs of persons with disabilities, and emphasize the abilities and rights of disabled persons rather than their exceptionalities; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly designate the month of October, in 2009 and in each succeeding year, as Disability History and Awareness Month in Virginia; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Governor be requested to encourage the people of the Commonwealth, including public schools, institutions of higher education, the business and corporate community, civic and advocacy organizations, the faith community, and other interested entities, through education and other appropriate activities, programs, and events to promote and highlight Disability History and Awareness Month in Virginia; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate transmit a copy of this resolution to Lisbet Ward, chairwoman of the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, requesting that she further disseminate copies of this resolution to the Youth Leadership Forum of Virginia so that their members may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly of Virginia in this matter; and, be it

RESOLVED FINALLY, That the Clerk of the Senate post the designation of this month on the General Assembly's website.

VI. Washington State

Background

Andrea Kadlec, Director of Community Relations at Disability Rights Washington, spoke with Ann Meadows, Executive Director of the West Virginia (WV) Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC), in the spring or summer of 2006, when she learned about the [WV legislation](#) at a youth conference. Kadlec attended a subsequent youth conference call on culture, was inspired, and put together a draft bill that later became the template for the final bill (below). Kadlec started disseminating the draft to youth advocacy groups, including those in our Self-Advocacy in Motion Project, a youth-led project that builds advocacy and leadership skills for youth with disabilities in high schools and transition programs. [Disability Rights Washington](#), passed this information on to other statewide self advocacy groups including the [Washington State Special Education Coalition](#) (WSSEC), to see if they could garner interest. WSSEC helped them orchestrate a meeting with [Senator McAuliffe](#) in the summer of 2007.

Senator McAuliffe had served on the local school board, presided on the [Senate Education Committee](#), and has family members with learning disabilities. Disability Rights Washington gave her the information on the West Virginia law. Senator McAuliffe agreed to sponsor a bill for them, and she and WSSEC's public policy chair began networking the idea and finding co-sponsors. Disability Rights Washington called the PTA to inform them of the initiative. Disability Rights Washington got feedback pretty quickly that there was concern from principals/administrators that this would be an 'unfunded mandate' and 'one more thing.' They put together a resource sheet for legislators, and encouraged people to let others know this was a civil rights issue that didn't have to cost the state money, nor did it create an unnecessary burden for our teachers.

Disability Rights Washington approached several self-advocacy groups, [People First of Washington](#), [Self Advocates in Leadership](#) and [Self Advocates of Washington](#), and all loved the idea. Many of these groups were involved with high school-aged youth, as well. All were involved in visiting legislators on advocacy day and talking to legislators about the bill. Students from across the state wrote letters to their legislators in support, and Disability Rights Washington had over 90 students visit Olympia on behalf of the bill, during an 'advocacy day'. One of the high school classrooms put together a video, for legislators, with students introducing themselves and articulating the significance of the legislation. Disability Rights Washington helped organize appointments with legislators, and students provided testimony at a Senate Education hearing, organized by Senator McAuliffe. At this hearing, [Senator Rodney Tom](#) said he had asked his

daughter, who was learning about Harriett Tubman, whether or not her textbook said anything about Ms. Tubman having a disability. (Ms. Tubman had epilepsy.) After finding nothing in the book about Ms. Tubman's disability, he became convinced this was an important part of history that had been overlooked. He and others thanked the students for their work on this important issue.

Youth were very compelling in their testimony to legislators and others. They spoke of bullying, tolerance and the desire to be respected in school. The high school students, who put the video together, presented the video to their school board and received a standing ovation.

Groups opposed to the legislation knew that it would be politically insensitive to speak out against the students. The legislation seemed thwarted with a fiscal note attached at the last minute. However, Senator McAuliffe successfully advocated for its removal. The legislation passed without a single 'nay' vote and some very gracious legislator testimony on its behalf. [The Governor](#) subsequently signed it into law.

There were many who contributed to the success of the legislation. The State Special Education Coalition was instrumental. Senator McAuliffe definitely championed the legislation. The [Governors' Committee on Disability and Employment Issues](#) and their Youth Leadership Forum leaders were helpful in coordinating advocacy days. It was the youth, in the end, who carried the bill into law. Legislators listened carefully and were inspired by the students. The youth were empowered and knew they had made a difference. It was an absolute gift to be involved in the process.

Implementation has been spotty, at best. Disability Rights Washington is interested in learning what strategies others have employed to have consistency in implementation statewide. Disability Rights Washington thinks an implementation section is a great idea. (One of the things the organization discussed with youth, when they talked about disability law and civil and human rights, is the difference between law and practice. A law is not a guarantee.) The organization acknowledges that some have had luck getting their state department of education on board so implementation is consistent statewide. It is a difficult issue to move forward in the midst of so many serious budget cuts, and when the education funding system is in such dire straits, and so many of Washington's families are in crisis. Disability Rights Washington continues to look for ways to encourage the practice of the law, however.

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Washington's Disability History Awareness Bill

The text of Washington's disability history awareness bill reads as follows:

Senate Bill 6313

State of Washington 60th Legislature 2008 Regular Session

Read first time 01/15/08. Referred to Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education.

AN ACT Relating to disability history month; adding a new section to chapter 28A.230 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 28B.10 RCW; and creating new sections.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** This act may be known and cited as the disability history month act.

NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** The legislature finds that annually recognizing disability history throughout our entire public educational system, from kindergarten through grade twelve and at our colleges and universities, during the month of October will help to increase awareness and understanding of the contributions that people with disabilities in our state, nation, and the world have made to our society. The legislature further finds that recognizing disability history will increase respect and promote acceptance and inclusion of people with disabilities. The legislature further finds that recognizing disability history will inspire students with disabilities to feel a greater sense of pride, reduce harassment and bullying, and help keep students with disabilities in school.

NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** A new section is added to chapter 28A.230 RCW to read as follows:

Annually, during the month of October, each public school shall conduct or promote educational activities that provide instruction, awareness, and understanding of disability history and people with disabilities. The activities may include, but not be limited to, school assemblies or guest speaker presentations.

NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** A new section is added to chapter 28B.10 RCW to read as follows:

Annually, during the month of October, each of the public institutions of higher education shall conduct or promote educational activities that provide instruction, awareness, and understanding of disability history and people with disabilities. The activities may include, but not be limited to, guest speaker presentations.

Glossary of Useful Terms

ADOPTION — Approval or acceptance; usually applied to amendments or resolutions.

AMENDMENT — Any proposed alteration to a bill or resolution as it moves through the legislative process. Amendments to a measure may be proposed by members in their assigned committees or by any member of a chamber during that chamber's second reading or third reading consideration of the measure.

BILL — A type of legislative measure that requires passage by both chambers of the legislature and action by the governor. A bill is the primary means used to create and change the laws of the state or territory. The term "bill" also is used generically to refer to the various types of legislative measures that may be introduced during a legislative session. Bill types include: senate and house bills, senate and house joint resolutions, senate and house concurrent resolutions, and senate and house resolutions.

BILL ANALYSIS — A document prepared for all bills reported out of committee that explains in nonlegal language what a bill will do. A bill analysis may include background information on the measure, a statement of purpose, and a detailed analysis of the content of the measure.

BIPARTISAN — A term used to refer to an effort endorsed by both political parties or a group composed of members of both political parties.

CAPTION — A statement that gives the legislature and public reasonable notice of the subject of a bill or resolution. For bills and joint resolutions, the first sentence of the text that summarizes the contents of the bill or resolution. For other types of resolutions, a brief description of the contents of the resolution.

CHAIR — A legislator appointed to preside over a legislative committee. A traditional designation for the member currently presiding over a house of the legislature or one of its committees.

CHAMBER — The place in which the senate or house of representatives meets. Also a generic way to refer to a house of the legislature.

COAUTHOR — A legislator authorized by the primary author to join in the authorship of a bill or resolution. A coauthor must be a member of the chamber in which the bill was filed.

COMMITTEE — A group of legislators, appointed by the presiding officer of the house or the senate, to which proposed legislation is referred or a specific task is assigned.

COMMITTEE REPORT — The text of a bill or resolution and its required attachments that is prepared when the measure is reported from a committee for further consideration by the members of the chamber. The committee report includes the recommendations of the committee regarding action on the measure by the full house or senate and generally is necessary before a measure can proceed through the legislative process.

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE — A complete, new bill or resolution recommended by a committee in lieu of the original measure. A committee will report a committee substitute rather than a bill with a large number of individual amendments when the committee wishes to make a substantial number of changes to the original measure. The committee substitute must contain the same subject matter as the original measure.

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE — A committee composed of five members from each house appointed by the respective presiding officers to resolve the differences between the house and senate versions of a measure when the originating chamber refuses to concur in the changes made by the opposite chamber. Upon reaching an agreement, the conferees issue a report that then is considered for approval by both houses.

CONFERENCE COMMITTEE REPORT — The text of a bill and its required attachments that is issued when a conference committee has completed its work in resolving the differences between the house and senate versions of a measure.

CONSTITUENT — A citizen residing within the district of an elected representative.

COSPONSOR — A legislator who joins with the primary sponsor to guide a bill or resolution through the legislative process in the opposite chamber. A cosponsor must be a member of the opposite chamber from the one in which the bill was filed.

ENGROSSED — The stage in a bill's legislative progress when it has been passed by the chamber in which it was filed and all amendments to the bill have been incorporated into the text of the bill, which is then forwarded to the second house for consideration.

ENROLLED — The stage in a bill's legislative progress when it has been passed by both chambers of the legislature in identical form and is prepared for signature by the presiding officers of both houses. If the bill is not passed in identical form by both houses, any changes made by the opposite chamber must be accepted by the originating chamber or a conference committee report must be adopted by both chambers before the bill may be enrolled.

FILED — The stage in a bill's legislative progress when it is given a bill number and introduced into the legislative process. Members of the House of Representatives file bills with the chief clerk of the house. Senators file bills with the secretary of the senate.

FLOOR ACTION — Action taken by either house on a bill reported by a committee. Subject to rules adopted by the respective house, its members may propose amendments, enter debate, seek to promote or prevent a bill's passage, and vote on its final passage in that house.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES — The lower house of Legislature, consisting of members elected from districts of roughly equal population, all of whom are elected every two years for two-year terms.

LEGISLATURE — The lawmaking body of the State. It consists of two chambers, the House of Representatives and the Senate.

MAJORITY — A number of members that is greater than half of the total membership of a group and that has the power to make decisions binding on the whole. There are two types of majorities that may be required for legislative approval of bills and other actions—a simple majority and an absolute majority. A simple majority consists of more than half of those members present and voting. An absolute majority consists of more than half of those members entitled to vote, whether present or absent.

MOTION — A formal suggestion presented to a legislative body for action by one of its members while the body is meeting.

NONPARTISAN — Free from party domination.

OVERRIDE — To set aside or annul, as to override a veto.

PASSAGE — Approval of a measure by the full body.

PUBLIC HEARING — A meeting of a house or senate committee or subcommittee during which public testimony may be heard and formal action may be taken on any measure or matter before the committee or subcommittee.

READING — The presentation of a bill before either house by the recital of the caption of the bill. Until a bill is finally passed, it will be in the process of a first, second, or third reading. The first reading of a bill is the point in the process when the bill is referred to committee by the appropriate presiding officer. The second reading of a bill is the first point in the process when the entire membership of a chamber has the opportunity to debate the bill and amend it by majority vote. The third reading of a bill is the next point in the process when the entire membership of a chamber may debate a bill and the final opportunity the members of a chamber have to offer amendments to the bill.

SPONSOR — The legislator who guides the bill through the legislative process after the bill has passed the originating chamber. The sponsor must be a member of the opposite chamber of the one in which the bill was filed.

VETO — The rejection of an enrolled bill by the governor.

VOICE VOTE — A vote during which the presiding officer will request the members who are voting in favor of a measure or motion to respond collectively by saying “aye” and those who are voting against the measure or motion to respond collectively by saying “nay.”