



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
OFFICE OF PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY FOR
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
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November 4, 2013

The Honorable Christopher S. Murphy
B40A Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

Dear Senator Murphy:

I write to discuss the importance of ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) to people with disabilities in Connecticut and throughout the United States.

As I know you are aware, the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons (OPA) with Disabilities is Connecticut's designated Protection and Advocacy system for safeguarding the civil rights of Connecticut residents with disabilities. Part of a nationwide network of similarly designated P&A agencies created by Congress, OPA has been investigating allegations of abuse and neglect and fighting against disability-based discrimination for over 30 years.

In the course of this work, our agency has come to recognize that the success of efforts to secure legally cognizable civil rights is inseparably linked to ever-evolving progress in social norms and cultural values; that there is a complex feed-back loop between what we recognize as rights, and how we see and respect those of our fellow human beings to whom those rights extend. Whenever there is a question of equal opportunity, whether it be in the context of education, voting rights, housing, employment or access to public spaces and services; or whenever there are even more basic questions about freedom from oppressive and dehumanizing treatment, progress is a function of both officially adopted legal reforms and powerful, but less formally recognized changes in social attitudes and responses.

In an ever-shrinking, increasingly inter-dependent world, this phenomenon transcends national borders: the way particular groups of people are treated and responded to on one part of the globe can directly influence how members of that group are treated and responded to in another. As subtle as these connections may appear, they are enormously powerful.

Over twenty years ago, Congress enacted the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) which, in essence, declared that people with disabilities were to be recognized as full citizens; that this is their world too, and they are entitled to participate in and contribute to its progress. Today, the ADA is celebrated for opening doors of opportunity and community inclusion throughout the country. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities holds out the same goals and ideals as the ADA: the empowerment of individuals with disabilities to achieve economic self-

sufficiency, live independently, and find inclusion in all aspects of society. It draws heavily on the language and conceptual structure of the ADA, and is compatible with other U.S. legislation that also define disability rights and programs of support, including the Rehabilitation Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

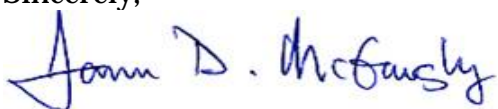
Given that the Convention draws so heavily on the Americans with Disabilities Act, one would think the United States would stand in the front ranks of ratifying nations. Yet, thus far, we have failed to do so. Failing to ratify sends an incongruous and damaging message – one that says, in effect, we will not become involved in efforts to secure world-wide recognition of what we have previously said are important civil rights for all people; that Americans with disabilities are just lucky to be here and not elsewhere.

In a very real sense, continued failure to ratify the Convention weakens our commitment to equal rights and opportunities for Americans with disabilities. While ratification will have no impact on U.S. sovereignty, failing to ratify signals a lesser commitment to the civil rights of people with disabilities than we have made to the rights of other minority groups. The United States has ratified a number of international human rights treaties, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and for decades has participated in international human rights bodies and committees. These previously ratified human rights treaties also recognize rights that Americans have long enjoyed, such as the right to equality under the law, the right to due process, and the right to be free from discrimination. The United States ratified these treaties because they adhere to long established American values. United States ratification of the CRPD would demonstrate this nation's continued commitment to the values that all individuals with disabilities are accorded equal rights as those without disabilities.

Ratification is required for the United States to participate in the CRPD Conference of States Parties and in elections to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, both of which will guide implementation of the treaty and continue to press for progress around the world. Ratification will also reinforce America's global leadership and put us in the strongest position to advance disability rights worldwide with the 129 nations and the European Union who are already party to the treaty. In addition, ratification of the CRPD will assist veterans and others with disabilities who want to work, travel or study abroad by improving physical, technological, and communication access outside the United States. Over 20 Veteran Services organizations representing all generations of veterans support the treaty including: The American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, Vietnam Veterans of America, and Blinded Veterans Association.

Ratifying the CRPD will affirm America's leadership in regards to protecting and promoting the human and civil rights of persons with disabilities. Thank you for considering our input. If you or your staff have any questions please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



James D. McGaughey
Executive Director