

NATIONAL  
**DISABILITY RIGHTS**  
NETWORK



Protection & Advocacy for Individuals with Disabilities

October 30, 2013

Robert Menendez  
Chairman  
U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations  
444 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510-6225

Bob Corker  
Ranking Member  
U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations  
444 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510-6225

Re: Letter of Support from the National Disability Rights Network and Protection and Advocacy Agencies on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Dear Senators Menendez and Corker:

As the Senate begins consideration of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the undersigned Protection and Advocacy (P&A) agencies and their membership organization, the National Disability Rights Network write to express our strong support for this important human rights treaty.

P&A agencies exist in every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, U.S. territories (American Samoa, Guam, U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Northern Marianas Islands), and for Native Americans in the Four Corners region. Central to the work of the P&A agencies is the ability to investigate allegations of abuse and neglect of individuals with disabilities, and provide legal representation and other advocacy services to individuals with disabilities on a range of issues. Collectively, the P&A agencies are the largest provider of legally-based advocacy services to persons with disabilities in the United States.

The treaty establishes minimum international standards for the rights and freedoms of people with disabilities. The United States is fully free to, and in some areas already does, surpass these standards. The treaty reflects core American values such as the dignity of the individual, access to justice, the importance of family decision-making, and non-discriminatory treatment in employment and public accommodations. Ratification most importantly would provide the United States Government with a stronger ability to advocate for the realization of these rights and freedoms in the 138 nations and the European Union who are already party to the treaty.

Ratification is required for the United States to participate in the CRPD Conference of States Parties and elections to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, both of which will guide implementation of the treaty. Such participation is necessary to further the commitment of the United States to the protection and equal treatment of persons with disabilities. Ratification will also assist the United States to better achieve similar protections for American citizens with disabilities, including veterans, and the family members of active military, who travel abroad for employment, business, education, or recreation. Ratification provides the legal basis for the United States to advocate for changes in other countries that are also party to the CRPD, while maintaining United States sovereignty. American citizens with disabilities should have the opportunity to benefit from a world economy that is fully accessible.

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 contain 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 based on race. The United States ratified these human rights 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, including the right to live, access, and participate in their communities without discrimination. Given this nation's prior involvement with other human rights treaties, continued rejection of the CRPD by the United States says to Americans with disabilities that the protection of other civil rights across the world are of greater value to the United States than the civil rights of individuals with disabilities.

During consideration of the CRPD by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 2012, legal experts who served under both Republican and Democratic administrations testified that the United States, as the global leader in protecting the civil and human rights of persons with disabilities, is already in compliance with the CRPD with the reservations, understandings, and declarations submitted by the Administration. The witnesses also clearly articulated that the treaty is consistent with the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Rehabilitation Act, the Architectural Barriers Act, and numerous other federal statutes that P&A agencies work each day to ensure are enforced.

The following undersigned Protection and Advocacy agencies and the National Disability Rights Network are committed to continued leadership of the United States for the human rights and empowerment of the 57 million people with disabilities in the United States and the 1 billion people with disabilities worldwide. Therefore, we urge the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to approve, and the Senate to ratify, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Sincerely,

Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program  
Disability Law Center of Alaska  
Client Assistance Program and Protection & Advocacy (American Samoa)  
Arizona Center for Disability Law  
Disability Rights Center (Arkansas)  
Disability Rights California  
The Legal Center (Colorado)  
Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities (Connecticut)  
Community Legal Aid Society (Delaware)  
University Legal Services (District of Columbia)  
Disability Rights Florida  
Georgia Advocacy Office  
Guam Legal Services Corporation  
Hawaii Disability Rights Center  
DisAbility Rights Idaho  
Equip for Equality (Illinois)  
Indiana Protection and Advocacy Services  
Disability Rights Iowa  
Disability Rights Center of Kansas

Kentucky Protection and Advocacy  
Advocacy Center (Louisiana)  
Disability Rights Center (Maine)  
Maryland Disability Law Center  
Disability Law Center (Massachusetts)  
Michigan Protection and Advocacy Services  
Mid-Minnesota Legal Assistance/Minnesota Disability Law Center  
Disability Rights Mississippi  
Missouri Protection and Advocacy Services  
Disability Rights Montana  
Native American Disability Law Center  
Nebraska Advocacy Services  
Nevada Disability Advocacy & Law Center  
Disability Rights Center (New Hampshire)  
Disability Rights New Jersey  
Disability Rights New Mexico  
Disability Rights New York  
Disability Rights North Carolina  
North Dakota Protection & Advocacy Project  
Northern Marianas Protection & Advocacy Systems  
Disability Rights Ohio  
Oklahoma Disability Law Center  
Disability Rights Oregon  
Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania  
Office of the Governor/Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (Puerto Rico)  
Rhode Island Disability Law Center  
Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities (South Carolina)  
South Dakota Advocacy Services  
Disability Law & Advocacy Center of Tennessee  
Disability Rights Texas  
Disability Law Center (Utah)  
Disability Rights Vermont  
Disability Rights Center of Virgin Islands  
Disability Rights Washington  
West Virginia Advocates  
Disability Rights Wisconsin  
Wyoming Protection and Advocacy System