

United States International Council on Disabilities



6 February 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary ,

Congratulations on your appointment as Secretary of State. I write to you on behalf of the United States International Council on Disabilities (USICD) to urge the creation of a dedicated liaison position within your office. This role would serve as a direct link to U.S. organizations that provide training, advocacy, and community development for people with disabilities in foreign countries—a need that is especially critical given the uncertainty surrounding USAID.

With an estimated 60 million Americans—approximately 20% of the population—living with disabilities, this issue is not only domestic but global. In every country, the inclusion and empowerment of people with disabilities lead to stronger, more resilient communities. USAID has long understood that when nations invest in accessibility, education, and independence for people with disabilities, they unlock untapped potential and economic contributions. Your leadership in this space would send a powerful message about the United States' commitment to human rights and inclusion worldwide.

There are economic opportunities for U.S. businesses by creating new markets for American products and services designed for people with disabilities. This aligns with President Trump's America First agenda, which emphasizes boosting the U.S. economy by expanding market opportunities for U.S. businesses. These new markets would position the U.S. as a leader in disability rights, setting high standards for accessibility and inclusion worldwide. This is line with the President' vision of America as a global leader, promoting U.S. values and standards internationally. Also, of note, these markets would drive innovation in accessible technologies, giving U.S. companies a competitive edge which supports President Trump's focus on maintaining technological superiority and fostering innovation to keep the U.S. competitive on the global stage. All of opportunities creates jobs in the U.S. and again correlates with President Trump's America First agenda.

During the US Senate's consideration of the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, you emphasized the importance of using diplomacy tools and sharing US expertise to promote disability rights globally. You also highlighted that the US has robust national disability laws, such as the ADA, which set high

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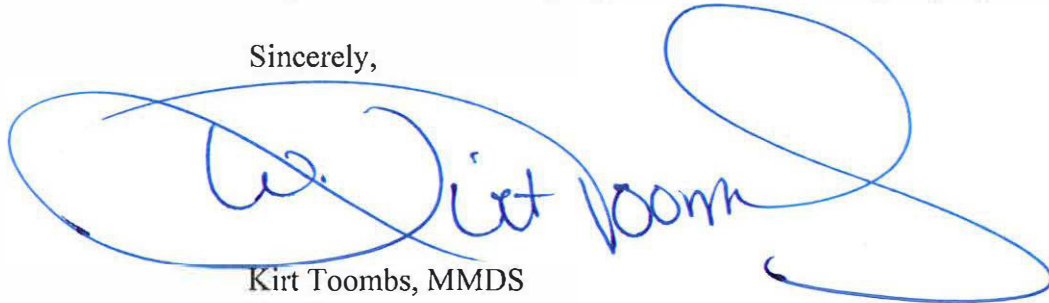
standards for accessibility and inclusion. We believe that creating a liaison position would align with these principles and further demonstrate the US's commitment to leading by example in the international community.

Lastly, we appreciate your leadership and approval for an Emergency Humanitarian Waiver for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) on January 29, 2025. The 20 million people living with HIV, who are directly supported by PEPFAR are also people with disabilities and can continue receiving core life-saving medication and services as a result.

In this pivotal moment, we encourage you to take a bold step in advancing bipartisan support for disability rights. People with disabilities span all political affiliations, and prioritizing their needs would be a strategic and unifying move for the new Republican majority. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this further and explore how this position could align with your office's goals.

Please feel free to contact our CEO, Isabel Hodge, at (540) 429-0864 or ihodge@usidc.org to arrange a conversation. We look forward to your response and to working together toward meaningful progress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kirt Toombs", with a large, stylized flourish extending from the end of the name.

Kirt Toombs, MMDS
President
U.S. International Council on Disabilities