



A Timeline of the American Disability Movement July 26, 2010

Organizations for people with disabilities founded before the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):

- 1880 – National Association of the Deaf
- 1920 – Disabled Veterans of America and National Mental Health Association
- 1940 – National Federation of the Blind
- 1946 – Paralyzed Veterans of America
- 1947 – President’s Committee on Employment of the Handicapped
- 1949 – United Cerebral Palsy Association
- 1950 – National Association for Retarded Citizens (ARC)
- 1961 – American Council for the Blind

Pre-ADA legislation and government programs for people with disabilities:

- 1902 – U.S. Public Health Service established to promote the importance of health care.
- 1918 – Veteran’s Rehabilitation Act created to provide training for veterans with disabilities.
- 1920 – Smith-Fess Act creates the Vocational Rehabilitation program to address industrial accidents resulting in impairments and war veterans.
- 1935 – Every state has a Vocation Rehabilitation program.

- 1956 – Social Security Act amended to provide income benefits for working-age people with disabilities.
- 1964 – Civil Rights Act passed.
- 1965 – Medicare and Medicaid programs created for select groups of people with disabilities, the elderly, and people with low income.
- 1968 – Architectural Barriers Act passed to require that buildings constructed, altered or financed by the Federal Government had to be physically accessible.
- 1968 – Civil Rights Act expanded to include the Fair Housing Act (Title VIII).

Circumstances related to the development of the Americans with Disabilities Act:

1972 – Hubert Humphrey proposes an amendment to the Civil Rights Act that would include disability as a protected class. The proposal does not move forward due to fears that it would open the Civil Rights Act up to scrutiny and result in other new or damaging amendments.

1973 – Rehabilitation Act passes and is to be implemented by the Rehabilitation Services Administration house in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW).

Significant sections of the act are:

#501 – Federal agencies are to develop affirmative action programs for hiring, placement and advancement for persons with disabilities

#502 – Establishes the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board to ensure compliance with the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 and to eliminate transportation barriers and seek ways to making housing accessible

#503 – Parties contracting with the US government are required to use affirmative action to employ qualified persons with disabilities

#504 – States that “...no otherwise qualified handicapped individuals in the United States...shall solely by reason of his handicap be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” Section 504 was crafted using language in the Civil Rights Act and Education Amendments Act of 1972. Section 504 did not mandate regulations and became known as “The Civil Rights Law for the Handicapped.”

However, three consecutive administrations fail to issue regulations for Section 504, in part due to the lack of expressly mandated regulations. Finally, President Gerald Ford assigns HEW with the responsibility to promulgate Section 504

regulations. HEW's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) is designated to craft the regulations, which they delivered to then HEW Secretary Casper Weinberger on July 23, 1975. Weinberger leaves that post and his successor, David Mathews, delays action by requiring additional analysis. On March 11, 1976, Mathews presents the regulations to the public. Mathews leaves office when Jimmy Carter assumes the Presidency. More delays result as the new HEW Secretary, Joseph Califano, wants further review before signing his name to the regulations.

Throughout this time, the disability community is uniting through annual meetings of the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped. A group of disability activists creates a coalition called the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities (ACCD), which many consider to be the first major cross-disability organization.

1975 – Education for All Handicapped Children Act passed.

1980 – At least 30 million Americans are living with a disability, introducing a societal shift in how the disability population is regarded.

1981 – Under President Reagan, section 504 and Education for All Handicapped Children Act are altered during a wave of deregulation and funding cuts. Vice President George Bush is tapped to head up a deregulation task force. Working on the task force introduces him to disability issues. He designates C. Boyden Gray, chief counsel, to lead the task force.

1982 – Proposed changes to Section 504 are leaked and disability organizations are furious. Evan Kemp, Jr., who ran the Disability Rights Center sponsored by Ralph Nader, works with Gray to prevent alterations to Section 504 of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. The disability community mobilizes a grassroots letter-writing campaign, flooding the White House with 40,000 letters. Members of the community also attend public hearings to demonstrate their opposition to the potential changes. Regulatory efforts are abandoned the following year. For the disability community, their efforts created a groundswell for a common cause.

President Reagan appoints Joe Dusenbury as chairperson of the National Council on Disabilities (NCD), after disbanding the current committee. Dusenbury appoints two vice-chairs: Justin Dart and Sandra Parrino. NCD does not have a good reputation at this time, so the council is charged with writing a report to prove its legitimacy. Justin Dart begins his public forums and visits every state to discuss disability policy and gather information for the report. The report was not well-received by the Reagan administration. Ultimately, the NCD would become an independent organization without ties to the president.

Mid-to-late 1980's – Students with disabilities attending college are seeking equal access to post-secondary education, public buildings, transportation and housing, and making their voices heard through student government activities and local organizing groups

working on behalf of people with disabilities.

1984 – NCD is charged with a congressionally-mandated review of all federal programs relating to disability and developing recommendations on how best to promote the independence of people with disabilities and reducing dependence on governmental programs.

1986 – *Toward Independence*, NCD’s landmark report, is released on February 1 and presented to President Reagan, Vice President Bush, and Speaker of the House James Wright. The report is significant because it calls for “a proposal for a national, comprehensive approach to disability policy.”

1987 – NCD completes a draft of what would become the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1987.

1988 – NCD enlists the support of Senator Lowell Weicker and Congressman Tony Coelho to sponsor the ADA bill. It is introduced to the Senate on April 28 and the House on April 29.

1989 – Senate hearings held in May and June. These hearings result in a bipartisan compromise bill. The Senate passes the ADA by a vote of 76 to 8 on September 7, 1989.

1990 – The House begins its deliberations using the Senate bill but, because of issues related to the cost burden and litigation potential, business organizations lobby against the bill. It takes the House nine months to bring the bill to a vote. In spite of attempts to weaken the bill, it passes the House by a vote of 403 to 20 on May 22.

A controversial amendment, the Chapman amendment, is approved. This amendment allows employers to legally remove persons with contagious diseases, such as AIDS, from food handling positions, even where there was no evidence the disease could be transmitted. The Chapman amendment is a stumbling block for the ADA as the disability community and congressional sponsors would not sponsor the bill with the amendment. A conference between the House and Senate would ultimately settle the issue after two months of talks.

Thanks to Senator Orrin Hatch, who crafted the compromise, the House and Senate pass the ADA in its final form on July 12 and July 13, 1990. President Bush signs the ADA into law as Public Law 101-336 on July 20, 1990.

Source: www.ncd.gov