



National Council on the Handicapped

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An Independent Federal Agency

October 23, 1987

To: Members and Friends of the Disability Community

From: Sandra S. Parrino, Chairperson

Subject: Introduction of Council's Equal Opportunity Proposal

As you know, the National Council on the Handicapped, in its report Toward Independence, stated as its primary recommendation to the President and Congress:

Congress should enact a comprehensive law requiring equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities, with broad coverage and setting clear, consistent, and enforceable standards prohibiting discrimination on the basis of handicap.

This recommendation reflected the input of thousands of Americans with disabilities and organizations representing them, and it was widely endorsed after the publication of the report. In 1986, the Council-launched Harris Poll of Americans with Disabilities reported that a near consensus of persons with disabilities favor expanded nondiscrimination protection for persons with disabilities.

I am pleased to report that senator Lowell Weicker has pledged to initiate action by Congress on this matter by introducing the enclosed bill which was developed by the Council. It follows point by point the Council's legislative proposal in Toward Independence. Senator Weicker has indicated his intent to introduce this bill, entitled "The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1987," in November. We expect the bill will be cosponsored by another influential member of the Senate so that it represents a truly bipartisan commitment to equality of people with disabilities. We also expect to announce soon that the bill will be introduced by leaders in the House of Representatives. We will report to you as soon as our expectations materialize in this regard.

This is an historic moment in the history of the disability rights and independent living movement of people with disabilities and their families in the United States. Obviously, the introduction of this landmark legislation is only one very important step in the struggle for equality and opportunity which dates back centuries.

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The bill which Senator Weicker will introduce goes far beyond the original provisions of section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and extends across the whole gamut of social and economic endeavors to ensure equal opportunity and protection against discrimination on the basis of handicap. We know a great struggle lies before us in the process of securing these rights, but we believe that the sacrifices and commitments which we will be called upon to make in securing our equality will be well justified.

I hope you join us in celebrating this major step forward in the recognition of rights and responsibilities of persons with disabilities. We are beginning to hear from organizations and individuals who want to register their opinion about this historic legislation. Please feel free to write us expressing your views and those of your organizations in regard to this proposed legislation.

I look forward to hearing from you.