

# Timeline of Disability Rights

## The Overlooked Civil Rights Issue

The Disability Rights Movement was sparked primarily by people with mobility problems who use wheelchairs – as a result of polio, spinal injuries, or cerebral palsy. There has been relatively little joint work with organizations of or for the blind, deaf, and developmentally disabled. Nevertheless, equal access to education, employment, transportation, health care, and attendant services have been unifying themes. Over the last few decades, the movement has

begun to approach disability in a new way. Rather than the “impairment model,” the modern disability rights movement focuses on the “civil rights model.” This addresses the misconception that because impairment causes disability, unless one is cured, one cannot expect equality. Therefore, as the disability rights movement redefines “disability,” the movement also challenges basic social assumptions about the nature of disability.

**While the concept of disability as a strength is not foreign to most of us in the disability rights movement, most Americans still view disability as an impairment to be cured, feared, or “risen above.”**

The first President with visible disabilities, Franklin D. Roosevelt, was elected, but the public was shielded from the extent of his disabilities.

1932



1935

The **Social Security Act** provided cash benefits, medical and therapeutic services for people with disabilities.

The first National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week, which later becomes **National Disability Employment Awareness Month**.

1945

**NDEAM**



1948

Congress passed legislation prohibiting discrimination in federal employment for people with physical disabilities.

Disability rights movement began, encouraged by the examples of the Civil Rights and Women's Rights Movements.

1960s



The **Community Mental Health Act** was passed to help those who were “warehoused” in institutions move back into their communities. While the number of institutionalized people in the U.S. dropped from a peak of 560,000 to just over 130,000, only half of the proposed community mental health centers were ever built.



1963

The **Architectural Barriers Act** was passed, mandating that federally constructed buildings and facilities be accessible to people with physical disabilities. *(This act is generally considered to be the first-ever federal disability rights legislation)*

1968



1972

The Center for Independent Living was founded in Berkley, California and led by disabilities activist Ed Roberts.

The **Rehab Act** established equal access for people with disabilities through removal of architectural, employment and transportation barriers in federal establishments.

1973



1975

The **Education for Handicapped Children Act** of 1975 (later the IDEA) guaranteed a free, appropriate, public education for all children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment.

During the 504 Protest, San Francisco activists held a 28-day sit-in calling for federal civil rights for people with disabilities. The measure was signed that year.

1977



1981

United Nations commemorated the first **International Year of Disabled Persons**. Alan A. Reich became the first person to address the U.N. **General Assembly from a wheelchair**.

The **National Organization on Disability (NOD)** was founded by Alan Reich to continue the momentum to promote disability inclusion.

1982



1984

**Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act** ensured equal access to the polls.

The **Deaf President Now** protest went on for 8 days at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. The movement succeeded in finally getting a president reflective of the student body.

1988



1990

President George H.W. Bush signed the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** into law, enshrining equal access and non-discrimination.

**American Association of People with Disabilities** was created, advocating for legal rights for people with disabilities.

1995



1996

**Mental Health Parity Act** banned health plans from imposing unwarranted dollar limits on mental health benefits.

President Clinton signed the **Internet Accessibility Law**, giving people with disabilities access to all electronic and information technology in the federal sector.

1998



1999

The Supreme Court's **Olmstead Decision** affirmed the right to live in the community rather than in state-run institutions. Renowned Civil and Women's Rights jurist Ruth Bader Ginsburg wrote the majority opinion.

**ADA Amendments Act** clarified and broadened the term “disability.”

2008



2012

The first ever **Global Accessibility Awareness Day** was celebrated, inspired by web developer Joe Devon's blog post.

**ABLE Act** allowed people with disabilities to have saving accounts that wouldn't hinder their Medicaid & Social Security Income benefits. The Section 503 rule change to the Rehab Act required federal contractors to begin affirmative hiring of people with disabilities with a goal of 7% workforce.

2013



2018

As part of the **FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018** the U.S. Department of Transportation began requiring that airlines track the number of reports they receive of mishandled wheelchairs and scooters.



U.S. Supreme Court rejected Domino's appeal to hear their 2016 lawsuit **Robles V. Domino's Pizza** about whether a blind man's failure to be able to order a pizza from its website violated the ADA.

2019



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