



September 26, 2023

**Statement from the CCD Board of Directors on  
The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973**

The Consortium for Constituents with Disabilities (CCD) Board commemorates 50 years since the historic passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehab Act) which prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in programs conducted by federal agencies, in programs receiving federal financial assistance, in federal employment, and in the employment practices of federal contractors. At the time of its signing, the Rehab Act was the first federal civil rights law for persons with disabilities in the history of the United States and is the foundation upon which all other federal civil rights protections for persons with disabilities are built.

While so many people across this nation benefit from the Rehab Act today, the road to its adoption and implementation was long and arduous. Between 1973 and 1977, no regulations were issued to implement Section 504 of the Rehab Act, which prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities by programs receiving federal funds. When regulations were finally drafted, the Federal government failed to issue final rules to enforce the law. A diverse coalition of disability advocates launched protests across the country culminating in a San Francisco federal building sit-in, lasting 26 days, by a group of cross disability activists and allies including the Black Panthers. The sit-in was pivotal to the implementation of the Rehab Act and sparked the flame that led to passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

We owe a tremendous debt to the disability activists and allies who fought for passage and implementation of the Rehab Act. Much is left to be done to realize a world in which people with disabilities are free from discrimination. With the perseverance of advocates, policymakers and Federal government stakeholders we are confident that the promise of the Rehab Act will be fulfilled. We acknowledge recent actions taken to uphold the Rehab Act's intent, such as the Department of Health and Human Services historic proposed rule, *Discrimination on the Basis of Disability in Health and Human Service Programs or Activities*. The rule seeks to update, clarify and strengthen the implementing regulation for Section 504 of the Rehab Act. The proposals are needed as people with disabilities, including disabled Black, Indigenous and other people of color and members of the LGBTQIA+ community continue to face barriers to equal and just access to care. We must work to ensure discrimination in health care is not tolerated and every person's life is valued.

We also look forward to the Department of Education's forthcoming proposed update to Section 504 that will strengthen and protect the rights of students with disabilities, including efforts to create school cultures and environments where every student can thrive. All of these efforts bring us closer to achieving the intentions enshrined in the Rehabilitation Act.

As we turn our attention to the next 50 years, we commit to continuing our advocacy for a world free of discrimination for all people with disabilities. The CCD Board acknowledges and is grateful for the advocacy and leadership of the more than 100 CCD member organizations and disability advocates across the country, including tribal lands and territories. The CCD Board joins the disability community in celebrating 50 years of the Rehabilitation Act.

### **Consortium for Constituents with Disabilities Board of Directors**

Carol Tyson, Chair, Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund

Claire Stanley, Vice-Chair, National Disability Rights Network

Dan Berland National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services

Dania Douglas, National Health Law Program

Tonia Ferguson, Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation

Tracey Gronniger, Secretary, Justice in Aging

Cyrus Huncharek, National Down Syndrome Congress

Vania Leveille, American Civil Liberties Union

Germán Parodi, The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies

Greg Robinson, Autistic Self Advocacy Network

Laura Weidner, Epilepsy Foundation

### **Resources**

We encourage CCD members to familiarize themselves with the history of the passage of the Rehabilitation Act and the Section 504 sit-in through the resources provided below.

DREDF Short History of 504. <https://dredf.org/504-sit-in-20th-anniversary/short-history-of-the-504-sit-in/>

Paul K. Longmore Institute on Disability. *Patient No More: People with Disabilities Securing Civil Rights Virtual Exhibit*. <https://longmoreinstitute.sfsu.edu/patient-no-more/virtual-tour>

Susan Schweik, *Bradley Lomax and the intersection of "Disability, Solidarity, and the Black Power of 504"*. <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/1371/1539>

Zinn Education Project, *April 28, 1977: Disability Rights Sit-Ins Force Enactment of Section 504* <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/tdih/sit-ins-force-504>