



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

**Statement on Second Article in Washington Post series,
“Disabled America”
Co-Chairs, CCD Social Security Task Force
June 5, 2017**

Washington, DC – Our Social Security system provides basic economic security for us all. Not only does Social Security provide the foundation for a secure retirement, it also insures nearly all American workers and their families against the possibility of a life-changing disability that prevents substantial work and earnings.

In March, The Washington Post launched a series to explore “...how disability is shaping the culture, economy and politics...” of rural America. As documented by the Center for American Progress, the first article was ridden with major errors that the Post only partially corrected. The article was also widely criticized for its skewed, dystopian portrayal of Beaverton, Alabama resident Desmond Spencer and his family.

Unfortunately, in its second article, the Post continues to report by anecdote and stereotype, leaving readers with an incomplete, flawed understanding of Social Security’s disability programs. The article profiles a family in Pemiscot County, Missouri: Kathy Strait, age 55, who was injured while working at a gas pump hose factory, and also has bipolar disorder and depression; her daughter, Franny Tidwell, age 32, who has Down syndrome; and Ms. Tidwell’s twin sons, William and Dale, age 10. Readers learn that Ms. Strait and Ms. Tidwell qualify for Social Security disability benefits, but that William and Dale no longer will. The Social Security Administration (SSA) has found that the twins, who originally began receiving benefits due to prematurity at birth and later were diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and a mood disorder, no longer meet Social Security’s stringent disability standard. As noted by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, SSA conducts frequent reviews of children, “...and often discontinues benefits — because disability among children can be fluid, especially as treatments advance.”

With record numbers of Americans today living in multigenerational households, it’s no surprise that the Post found one such family in rural Missouri. Unaddressed in the article’s narrative, a sidebar points out the obvious: that disability often runs in families. And while the article implies a growing trend, its own statistics suggest that the percentage of households where Social Security disability beneficiaries live with family members who also receive benefits has been relatively stable since 2000, as a share of working-age beneficiaries.

The facts matter, and reporting by anecdote runs the risk of fostering harmful policy changes: just last month, President Trump proposed cutting benefits to families where more

than one person receives Supplemental Security Income. As the Washington Post continues its series, we urge the Post to inform its readers of important facts about our Social Security system, including disability insurance and Supplemental Security Income, and to explore systemic solutions to reducing poverty, including for rural Americans and people with disabilities.

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) is a working coalition of national disability organizations working together to advocate for national public policy that ensures the self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society.

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