

CIVIL RIGHTS

OVERVIEW

The history of living with a disability in the United States has largely been one of discrimination, isolation, segregation, and exclusion from education, work, housing, and even from routine daily activities.

Fortunately, today people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) have the same basic legal, civil, and human rights as all other citizens. The U.S. Constitution, federal laws, and federal and state court decisions have established these rights. However, despite the tremendous advances, limitations of the laws and regulations, poor enforcement of the laws, limited funding for programs, disregard for legal precedent, and societal prejudices keep many people with disabilities from being fully included in our society. There is still much work to do to make true community integration and recognition of civil rights a reality for all, including those with the most significant disabilities.

WHY IT MATTERS

Disability rights are human rights. Everyone deserves to be included and live a full life in their community – accessing the same public spaces, housing opportunities, education, and work as anyone else. Many people with IDD experience multiple risk factors for human and civil rights violations. We emphasize that all people are entitled to human and civil rights, regardless of their age; gender; race/ethnicity; sexual orientation; cultural, linguistic, geographic, and spiritual diversity; economic status; severity of disability; intensity of needed supports; and other factors that expose them to increased risk of rights violations.

A key advancement in the recognition of the civil rights of people with IDD was the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990. This civil rights law seeks to eliminate discrimination against people based on their disabilities in employment, state and local government services, privately operated public accommodations (hotels, restaurants, stores, museums, etc.), transportation, and telecommunications. Great strides have been made in our society, but discrimination still exists. Attitudes, poor enforcement of the law, underfunded programs, and fiscal difficulties in state and local government budgets all contribute to the ongoing need to be vigilant advocates for full inclusion and equality.

Since the ADA became law, many other landmark civil rights laws and actions have impacted the lives of people with IDD. Another milestone in the inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of life was the 1989 landmark *Olmstead v. L.C.* U.S. Supreme Court decision. The ruling requires that all states eliminate unnecessary segregation of people with disabilities and to ensure that they receive services in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs.

Finally, the right to vote is a key civil right and one that people with IDD exercise to be part of our democracy. Ensuring voting independence, accuracy, and access continue to be key issues. Too many polling places and voting technology and practices throughout the country remain inaccessible and continue to disenfranchise voters.

WHAT THE ARC IS DOING

The Arc of NM works to promote and protect hard-won civil rights protections. We pull up a seat at the table at every opportunity where implementation or enforcement of civil rights laws come under attack, revision, or improvement.

Our Public Policy Goals

The Arc of NM Public Policy Goals outline recommendations on promoting and protecting the civil rights of people with IDD, and our commitment to right tis core to every topic we advocate for on the local, state, and national level.

See more on our [Public Policy Goals](#) on our website.