



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

**Full Statement of the International Task Force of
the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities
to the
National Council on Disability on Engagement with the Convention on the
Rights of Persons with Disabilities**

April 23, 2013

I would like to thank the members of the National Council on Disability (NCD) for this opportunity to provide comments on how the Council should engage with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). My name is David Hutt, and I am a senior staff attorney with the National Disability Rights Network, as well as a co-chair for the International Task Force of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD). The National Disability Rights Network is the membership organization for the federally funded Protection and Advocacy System. The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities is a coalition of over 100 national consumer, advocacy, provider and professional 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. Many CCD members and the P&A system publically support the CRPD. As the purpose of the Council is to “promote policies, programs, practices and procedures that guarantee equal opportunity for all individuals with disabilities . . . and empower individuals with disabilities to achieve economic self-sufficiency, independent living, and inclusion and integration into all aspects of society,” on behalf of the CCD International Task Force I offer three suggestions consistent with this purpose for how the Council can engage with the CRPD.

First, the CCD International Task Force encourages the Council to engage in a public awareness campaign to inform the disability community and the public at large about the importance of the CRPD and the need for United States ratification for Americans with disabilities. NCD should specifically raise awareness about the specific purpose of the CRPD, the message of support for disability rights which ratification brings, and the potential for tangible benefits ratification would provide to current and future generations of Americans with disabilities who wish to travel, study, work, and conduct business abroad.

The Council should highlight how ratification of the CRPD would provide the United States with the legal and legitimate ability to engage and work with other nations

who are parties to the CRPD to uphold anti-discrimination standards similar to what exist in the United States. In today's global society, United States ratification would place the U.S. government in a much stronger position to influence foreign governments who have ratified the CRPD to assure equal opportunities are available to U.S. citizens with disabilities. Without ratification, the United States is in a much weaker position to encourage, either bi-laterally or multi-laterally, that governments of the hundreds of nations which are parties to the CRPD assure U.S. citizens with disabilities do not face discrimination while abroad. when studying, traveling, and most importantly conducting business abroad.

As part of this public awareness campaign, NCD should highlight to the parents of children with disabilities the increased opportunity for their sons and daughters to engage in the global economy if the United States has the CRPD as a tool to better ensure other nations protect disability rights. Ratification would enable the U.S. government to work at both the multi-lateral and bi-lateral level to influence other nations to create laws and systems which prohibit discrimination based on disability, similar to what is enjoyed on U.S. soil under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). From requiring equality under the law, prohibiting employment discrimination based on disability, to eliminating accessibility barriers in public transportation, the CRPD seeks to ensure for people with disabilities in other nations what the ADA has done for the United States. These changes in nations around the world, would significantly expand the opportunities available for Americans with disabilities.

My colleague and fellow co-chair, Deborah Ziegler, Associate Executive Director of Policy and Advocacy for the Council for Exceptional Children also believes in the significance of NCD informing the disability community about the importance of the CRPD. According to Ms. Ziegler "U.S. ratification of the CRPD positions the U.S. to have an official voice internationally in the disability rights movement, international cooperation among agencies and UN Bodies, and advocacy for international law to ensure that all children with disabilities receive a quality education. Disability is the single most important factor in the exclusion of a child from school." The Convention serves to reinforce the mandates of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act as it relates to the provisions of a free appropriate public education including all rights afforded to families in the United States. Unfortunately, these same services and rights for families are not available to 90 percent of children with disabilities in developing countries according to some international organizations.

As part of this public awareness effort, NCD should inform the disability community, and the broader American public, that the United States has ratified a number of international human rights treaties, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and for decades has participated in international human rights bodies and committees. These previously ratified human rights treaties contain rights Americans have long advocated for and enjoyed, such as the right to equality under the law, the right to due process, the right to vote, and the right to be free from discrimination based on race. America ratified these human rights conventions because they adhere to long established laws and values of the United States. The CRPD also adheres to the longstanding effort to achieve equality for individuals with

disabilities in the United States. Our own ADA was a model for the CRPD. Given American involvement with other human rights treaties, the continued rejection of the CRPD by the United States says to Americans with disabilities that other civil rights protections are more important to the United States than the civil rights of individuals with disabilities.

Second, the International Task Force believes the Council should convene meetings, either quarterly or more frequently as the Council deems necessary, to discuss with the disability community the efforts made towards ratification by the United States government, and to seek input from the community about these efforts. As the Council and its staff are likely aware, CCD members employ numerous experts on a variety of disability topics covered in the treaty, such as accessibility, the education and employment of individuals with various disabilities, and on disability specific topics. The CCD International Task Force, and I am sure many individual CCD members, would be happy to share this experience with NCD in the context of informing the Council in more detail of the importance of United States full involvement in the CRPD.

Finally, the Council should continue to recommend to Congress the need for United States ratification of the CRPD to better provide for the equal opportunity and self-sufficiency of individuals with disabilities. In doing so, NCD should offer its expertise on the treaty to all members of the United States Senate to answer any questions and to explain why ratification is so important. The United States must ratify the CRPD to have the legal right to encourage other nations to implement the anti-discrimination provisions in the CRPD, and thus create equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities. On behalf of the CCD International Task Force, I thank the members of the Council for their time.