

For the past 100 years, the Anti-Defamation League has stood up against anti-Semitism, bigotry, and other pernicious stereotypes in our country and around the world. Like Anti-Semitism or any other form of bigotry, the roots of disability discrimination stem from the belief that persons with disabilities do not have the same natural rights to be a member of our communities. From my 28 years at Legal Aid of Miami, I brought my lifetime of experience at Legal Aid to Disability Independence Group to join the fight for equality for persons with disabilities. ADL has been involved in this fight for one hundred years, and we are ready to join this fight to ensure equal treatment.

Persons with Disabilities make up more than 20% of the population in Florida. Children with Disabilities are subject to incarceration at much higher rates than other children; persons with disabilities are at greater risk of becoming victims of domestic violence and hate crimes; and most persons with disabilities are excluded from basic opportunities for integration in the community and basic opportunities for employment, housing, medical treatment, education, and religious and cultural life.

The Anti-Defamation League has been a national leader on hate crimes laws. Nine years before the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act, in 1981, ADL drafted a model hate crimes penalty enhancement statute, inclusive of disability. The vast majority of the 45 state hate crimes laws, including Florida's, are based on this model. Furthermore, for 13 years, ADL lead the coalition that successfully advocated for the 2009 the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention, which includes disability.

This fight against hate extends to persons with disability in ways that must be addressed. Persons with disabilities are victimized at a rate three times higher than persons without disabilities. In 2012, 1.3 million violent crimes, that included rape and physical assault, occurred against persons with disabilities. PEOPLE With Disabilities are:

- \*3 times more likely to experience violent victimization as adolescents
- \*3 times more likely to experience rape, sexual assault, aggravated assault and robbery
- \*3 times more likely to be sexually abused as children

Disability Independence Group has been awarded a Training and Enhanced Services to End Violence against Women by the Office of Violence Against Women. With our partners, M.U.J.E.R, a sexual assault and domestic violence center, Dade Legal Aid, that provides representation to victims and CVAC – Miami Dade County's Victims Assistance Center we will spend the next three years working with experts from the federal government to create sustainable change within and between our organizations that will result in accessible, safe and effective services for victims who are persons with disabilities.

The ADL has long been involved in education and outreach to ensure that everyone is aware that persons with disabilities are entitled to equal rights and opportunity. The best way to reduce discrimination is to prevent stereotypes from being continued. At DIG, we identified an issue that persons with autism were subject to misunderstandings during police interactions as the officer would not have knowledge of Autism, and would interpret disability-related behavior as criminally suspicious behavior.

As a response to reduce assumptions and stereotypes about autism, DIG created the Wallet Card program to ensure that persons who live with Autism have a tool that they could use to self-identify their disability

when they encounter law enforcement personnel and other first responders. The Wallet Card is a laminated card that a person with autism or a developmental disability carries with them that is individualized and notifies a first responder of the specific disability-related issues. Along with the Card, we have trainings both for persons with autism or other developmental disabilities, and for first responders. Thus far, we have produced almost 2,000 cards, and will be adopted by the Miami-Dade County Commission as a project for Miami-Dade police in December.

The Anti-defamation League has also been instrumental in the fight to dismantle the School to Prison pipeline. The “School-to-Prison Pipeline” refers to the policies and practices that push our nation’s schoolchildren, especially our most at-risk children, out of classrooms and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Students who qualify for special education too often receive inferior services in segregated settings and incur repeated disciplinary actions. According to the U.S. Department of Education, students with disabilities are more than twice as likely to receive an out-of-school suspension (13 percent) than students without disabilities (6 percent). Students with disabilities represent 12 percent of the overall student population, yet make up 25 percent of all students involved in a school-related arrest. Many families reject special education because of the stigma attached to disability, or additional academic and behavioral supports are not provided to children who have been identified as a child with a disability. School-to-Prison Pipeline reform must include diversion from the juvenile justice system to provide the programs necessary for students with disabilities in the education system.

We are proud to have ADL as our ally in this fight, and look to their lead in protecting the rights of persons with disabilities. As Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable, every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.” As I look out into this audience, I see my friends in the steps towards justice, and those who have sacrificed and struggled for the future that we all work towards.