



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**Disability Advocates from Across Country Convene on Capitol Hill**

*Fifth annual Jewish Disability Advocacy Day brings Jewish community together*

Washington, D.C. – Disability insurance and transportation needs were today's top agenda items as disability advocates from across the country converged on Capitol Hill for the fifth annual Jewish Disability Advocacy Day. The Jewish Disability Network's members and advocates met with congressional representatives to convey the necessity of passing Social Security Disability Insurance and disability transportation programs.

An initiative sponsored by **The Jewish Federations of North America** and the **Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism**, the event brought activists together to learn about legislative issues that directly affect people with disabilities and their families. Over the course of the day, participants were briefed on key topics by experts including **Jay Ruderman**, president of the Ruderman Family Foundation; **Ari Ne'eman**, president of the Autistic Self Advocacy Network; **Allison Wohl**, Executive Director of the Association of People Supporting Employment First; and **Katy Beh Neas** and **Jennifer Dexter** of Easter Seals, a nonprofit organization that provides service sites for people with disabilities.

Among other legislative issues, advocates discussed the importance of Congressional action on Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), which is at risk of becoming insolvent by late 2016. Should SSDI become insolvent, it will result in a 20% across-the-board cut in benefits to all beneficiaries, including 8.9 million disabled workers and 2 million of their spouses and children. Without the program, it is estimated that half of those receiving SSDI benefits would live in poverty, and around 70 percent of recipients are over 50 years old.

Additionally, the group discussed the need for Congress to support transportation programs for persons with disabilities. The Jewish Disability Network advocates for the development and implementation of strong, comprehensive ADA transportation requirements, additional accessible transportation service, and for the provision of in-depth training for people with disabilities and others on ADA transportation. Many of these provisions are funded through the reauthorization of federal highway and transit programs of the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act (MAP-21), which expires on May 31, 2015.

"With the passage of the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act this past December, we witnessed the impact that people with disabilities and their allies can have on public policy and opinion," stated William Daroff, senior vice president for public policy and director of the Washington office of The Jewish Federations of North America. "SSDI is an invaluable program providing benefits to workers who have paid into the system for years, and we need members of Congress to step up to ensure that it does not become insolvent. The fight for inclusion does not end with any one bill, and we as a

community have the responsibility to ensure that all people have the same rights and opportunities to succeed.”

The event took place amidst February’s annual Jewish Disability Awareness Month, with the aim of mobilizing the Jewish community nationwide.

“The increasing inclusivity of our congregations and Jewish institutions is strengthened by the growing emphasis on advocacy within the Jewish community” said Rabbi Lynne Landsberg, senior advisor on disability issues at the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. “There are so many ways that our Congressional leaders can help improve inclusion, and making urgently needed new investments in public transportation is tremendously important in improving the mobility of people with disabilities. We truly hope that this day inspires our Congressional leaders to act quickly.”

The Jewish Disability Network works to increase disability awareness and to highlight these issues for lawmakers with the goal of affecting change for people with disabilities and their families. Jewish Disability Advocacy Day is generously cosponsored by: Agudath Israel of America, American Conference of Cantors, Association of Jewish Family and Children’s Agencies, B’nai B’rith International, HIAS, Hillel International, International Association of Jewish Vocational Services, JCC Association, Jewish Council for Public Affairs, Jewish Federation of Greater Washington, Jewish Foundation for Group Homes, Jewish Leadership Institute on Disabilities, Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, Keshet, National Council of Jewish Women, Orthodox Union, the Rabbinical Assembly, the Ruderman Family Foundation, UJA-Federation of New York, Women’s Rabbinic Network, and Yachad, National Jewish Council for Disabilities.

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*The Jewish Federations, collectively among the top 10 charities on the continent, protects and enhances the well-being of Jews worldwide through the values of tikkun olam (repairing the world), tzedakah (charity and social justice) and Torah (Jewish learning).*

*The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism is the Washington office of the Union for Reform Judaism, whose nearly 900 congregations across North America encompass 1.5 million Reform Jews, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, whose membership includes more than 2,000 Reform rabbis. Visit [www.rac.org](http://www.rac.org) for more.*