

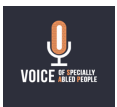


EVOLUTION OF INCLUSION IN THE U.S. FOR SPECIALLY ABLED PEOPLE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY BY **EMILY KENNEDY** | AUGUST 2020

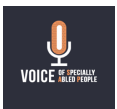
The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines a person with a disability (PWD) as a “person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.” However to fully understand where this definition comes from, we have to understand the history of PWDs. At the very heart of the early 20th century, the argument defending the exclusion of disability was “Normality was intimately connected to the western nation/notion of progress”. The ADA has created a lot of positive momentum in the push for inclusion in the U.S. and it has opened avenues for setting an example for other countries. However, disability crosses over sexuality, gender, class, race, and these factors play a direct role in creating one’s identity. This is why there are still changes to be made to the overall definition of disability and as Mia Mingus says, “Disability is not monolithic. Ableism plays out very differently for wheelchair users, deaf people, or people who have mental, psychiatric, and cognitive disabilities. None of these are mutually exclusive and are complicated by race, class, gender, immigration, sexuality, welfare status, incarceration, age and geographic location.”¹ As of 2017, 61 million American adults live with a disability and together they make up 26% of the nation’s population. It has been 30 years since the ADA was ratified and under this federal law Americans with disabilities have been protected from discrimination across a variety of fields but there is still much work to be done.

Through a greater understanding of the needs of PWDs and understanding their history and struggles we can better create and propose policy reform to ensure that they are given the civil protections that they need. The study explored the facets of disability through the categories of healthcare, education, housing, and employment and by analyzing pieces of legislation, was able to put together a comprehensive analysis of the past four decades evolution of inclusion. This was conducted by analyzing the number of amendments to each bill, the frequency at which bills were passed and the state compliance data. Some of the major findings were that as the years have passed, the number of PWDs have increased, while the number of bills passed have hardly increased especially in the past ten years. Additionally, this study created an interactive timeline and through this made the research and history of disability legislation in the U.S. more digestible for the general public. What I found specifically interesting was the trend of regular bills being passed and amended on a regular basis up until the past twenty years. It seems that the number of PWDs has not decreased and is in fact growing but the lack of new bills being passed does not meet their needs. Healthcare has seen major



improvements in quality of care and level of treatment for PWDs, education has made significant strides and gained federal funding for public schools though still needs improvement in support in higher education institutions, housing though a baseline of needs have been met is still hard to obtain for many PWDs in the U.S., and the number of employed PWDs has gone up with tax incentives from the federal government but could also be further expanded and explored as remote work becomes a more feasible option. Moving forward there is still much research to be done and this research sets a precedent for expanding rights for PWDs and especially now during this global pandemic it is pertinent to learn how PWDs are being affected in the areas of housing, employment, healthcare, and education because all these areas are being directly affected by COVID-19.

¹ "Conclusion: Disability Justice." Building Access: Universal Design and the Politics of Disability, by Aimi Hamraie, University of Minnesota Press, MINNEAPOLIS; LONDON, 2017, pp. 255–262. JSTOR,



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Emily Kennedy is a student at University of California, Los Angeles and is double majoring in Microbiology, Immunology, and Molecular Genetics and Gender Studies. She is on the leadership team for Speak out for Surgery, an organization focused on bridging the gap of healthcare inequity and she is the executive director of the Working for Organizing and Research Collective a student group advocating for the rights of student workers through research. She also volunteers at Ronald Reagan Hospital in the Oncology department on the weekends. Outside of university, Emily enjoys going on hikes in the mountains and working on her quarantine vegetable garden.

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WHY THIS MATTERS TO VOSAP

VOSAP advocacy is strengthened with its understanding of the US system as the US is way ahead than most of the developing countries for rights of Specially Abled People. This research project is aimed at compiling the information on the evolution of the inclusion for Specially Abled People in the U.S. with the lens of major legislations, Supreme Court cases in the areas of healthcare, housing, employment and education in the last 100 years.

ABOUT VOICE OF SPECIALLY ABLED PEOPLE INC.

The Voice of Specially Abled People (VOSAP) is a global advocacy organization built on the principles of Empowerment of Specially Abled People. In Special Consultative Status with UN ECOSOC, VOSAP is working to create an Inclusive and Accessible world by accelerating implementation of UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and goals of UN CRPD (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) treaty. The organization has created the VOSAP Mobile App through which volunteers can take a pledge to volunteer and rate the accessibility of public places, creating a crowdsourcing platform to aggregate demand for accessibility.

