

The Importance of Teaching Disability History and Awareness

Act Today Influence Tomorrow, an advocacy group of young people with disabilities organized by Easter Seals and the Boston Center for Independent Living, is advocating for the inclusion of disability history and awareness education in the curriculum. We have drafted legislation that would require that disability history and awareness be taught in all schools within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

We need this legislation because:

- Education will help increase understanding of disability and the unique elements of disability culture. Having a disability is just one facet of the individual, and it is something most families experience, as nearly 20% of the population has a disability.
- People with disabilities are often marginalized and even invisible, isolated in their homes from their community, or educated in separate classrooms or healthcare facilities. Through disability history and awareness education, people with disabilities as well as the community at large will begin to realize that we have and will continue to make contributions to society.
- People with disabilities share a long history and rich culture. A few names of notable achievers with disabilities include: Harriet Tubman, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, JFK, Princess Diana, Helen Keller, Steven Hawking, Ray Charles, Marlee Matlin, William “Dummy” Hoy, Billy Joel Michael J. Fox, Muhammed Ali, Richard Pryor, and Winona Ryder.
- States that have passed a Disability History bill are Florida, North Carolina, Washington State, and West Virginia. Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, New York, and Pennsylvania are working on this legislation. It’s time for Massachusetts to step up and maintain its longstanding leadership role in advancing the education and independence of people with disabilities.
- Resources supporting disability history education: <http://www.nclد-youth.info/index.htm>, <http://www.disabilityhistoryweek.org/>, <http://www.disabilitymuseum.org/>, <http://www.disabilityhistory.org/index.html>, <http://www.tolerance.org/teach/activities/activity.jsp?p=0&ar=631>, <http://www.disabilitystudiesforteachers.org/>
- Bill S. 1469 is co-sponsored by Senator Tolman and Representative L’italien. Senator Morrissey and Senator O’Leary have also sponsored. Please contact:
Jennifer Fay, Legislative Director
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- Organizational sponsors: AD Lib, Boston Center For Independent Living, C.O.R.D., Center for Living and Working, Cerebral Palsy of Massachusetts, Cotting School, Helping Hands Club of Massasoit Community College, Independence Associates, Independent Living Center of the North Shore & Cape Anne, Institute for Community Inclusion, Metro West Center for Independent Living, Multi-cultural Independent Living Center of Boston, Northeast Independent Living Program, Southeast Center For Independent Living, Stavros

For more information about Act Today Influence Tomorrow please contact Colleen Flanagan of Easter Seals at 1-800-244-2756 x410 or Stacy Rogers of Boston Center for Independent Living at 617-338-6665 x232.