

# Disability Community Unveils Key Principles of Community Integration

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Washington — July 31, 2013 — At two congressional briefings celebrating the 23rd anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) on Monday, the Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law unveiled a set of consensus principles reflecting the disability community's shared vision of community integration. The document, entitled *Community Integration for People with Disabilities: Key Principles*, lays out a vision in which people with disabilities are afforded opportunities to live in their own homes, work in regular, non-segregated employment, and make their own choices.

The U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee highlighted the Key Principles in its recent report, *Separate and Unequal*, detailing how state service systems continue to serve many thousands of people with disabilities in needlessly segregated settings, despite the ADA's requirement that states administer services to people with disabilities in the most integrated setting appropriate.

Embracing the key principles are 26 major national organizations representing people with disabilities, family members, service providers, and state administrators. (A full list of signatories is on the second page of the Principles document.) Examples include the American Association of People with Disabilities, the Arc of the United States, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the National Federation of the Blind, Paralyzed Veterans of America, the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services, and the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors.

"Our disability service systems must begin to make these principles a reality for all people with disabilities," stated Ira Burnim, legal director at the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, at Monday's briefings. "While most states have expressed a desire to do the right thing," Burnim added, "they have failed to implement these principles on a large scale."

"People with disabilities want the same things as people without disabilities: to make their own choices, to work, to have a place called home, and to have family and friends," added Burnim. "We know now that we can support people with disabilities to live very much like those without disabilities."

Burnim was one of seven speakers at the events, which featured officials from the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, a member of the National Council on Disability, a former resident of a nursing home, and other experts.