



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Democratic Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James E. Risch
Chairman
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bob Menendez
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Washington, DC 20515

July 27, 2020

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Chairman Risch and Ranking Member Menendez,

The undersigned members of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) Rights Task Force write to urge you to advance S. 3880, the Office of International Disability Rights Act. CCD is the largest coalition of national organizations working together to advocate for federal public policy that ensures the self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society.

The United States has shown leadership domestically on disability rights with the enactment and implementation of federal disability discrimination protections including the Americans with Disabilities Act, the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Fair Housing Amendments Act. While implementation of these laws has been far from perfect and much work remains to be done, these laws have brought enormous positive change, dramatically improved the lives of people with disabilities and benefitted American society as a whole. Our country's leadership in this area should be leveraged to support international disability rights. Support for individuals with disabilities is in the diplomatic, economic, and humanitarian interests of the U.S.; generates goodwill towards the U.S.; and highlights American values through the work of governmental, nongovernmental, and faith-based organizations of the U.S.

When the U.S. Senate failed to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2012, Senator Bob Corker, who would later serve as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, and others in the Senate expressed the view that the U.S. could continue to exercise leadership in international disability rights bilaterally, working with individual countries on their CRPD implementation issues. While we still believe it is imperative for the U.S. to ratify the CRPD, until it does so, it should at least exercise international leadership on disability rights in the meantime.

In June, Senator Bob Casey introduced the Office of International Disability Rights Act (S. 3880) that would enable the U.S. to exercise such leadership. It establishes a permanent office within the Department of State and appoints an Ambassador-at-Large at the Under-Secretary level. The legislation also:

- Requires the office to coordinate U.S. government efforts regarding human rights for persons with disabilities and advance the status of persons with disabilities in U.S. foreign policy.
- Requires the Department to prioritize hiring, recruitment, and overseas accessibility practices of civil service employees and foreign service officers (FSOs) with disabilities.
- Requires the Department to ensure U.S. embassies, consulates and other overseas facilities are accessible and compliant with the Rehabilitation Act.
- Requires all civil service and foreign service personnel to undergo disability inclusion training-- not only on workplace inclusion but also in foreign assistance programming and policymaking.
- Requires FSOs (A100 class) to be trained on recognizing risks and vulnerabilities of individuals with disabilities in specific country contexts and disability inclusion in policymaking.
- Requires a report and briefing on implementation within 180 days.

By making the Office of International Disability Rights permanent; assuring the level of authority it needs to be successful; and formalizing a policy of disability access and inclusion in foreign operations—three concrete steps—we would be upholding the best principles of disability rights that we live by in our own society. The U.S. will be able to do more and show more of its disability rights leadership on the world stage. There is no time to waste. It is a matter of human rights, but it is much more during this time of COVID-19. People with disabilities and how they are treated in education, employment, health care, housing, transportation, and other areas are a reflection, good or bad, of how others are treated. We urge you to embrace this legislation. If Congress adopts it, together we will expand the capacity of the U.S. to influence the quality of life for one billion people with disabilities around the world.

Thank you for your consideration of this important legislation. Our Task Force is ready, willing, and able to work with you on ensuring this promise. Please contact Isabel Hodge (ihodge@usidc.org) with any questions.

Sincerely,

American Council of the Blind

American Foundation for the Blind

American Therapeutic Recreation Association

The Arc of the United States

Association of University Centers on Disabilities

Autism Society of America

Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

CommunicationFIRST

National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities

National Council on Independent Living

National Disability Rights Network

Paralyzed Veterans of America

United Spinal Association

United States International Council on Disabilities