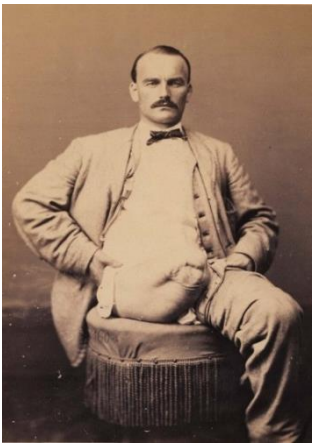
A Brief History of Disability

In the United States and Massachusetts



A Publication of the

Massachusetts Office on Disability

2016

“The governor shall annually issue a proclamation setting apart the month of October as Disability History Month to increase awareness and understanding of the contributions made by persons with disabilities. Appropriate state agencies and cities and towns and public schools, colleges and universities shall establish programs designed to educate and promote these objectives.”

— *Massachusetts General Law Chapter 6, Section 15LLLLL.*

The Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD) is pleased to present this publication which will provide a brief history of significant disability policies, developments, and figures in the United States and Massachusetts throughout the past two centuries in commemoration of Disability History Month.

Note: *The Massachusetts Office on Disability recognizes that the following Timeline includes language used to describe people with disabilities that is deemed inappropriate and insensitive today. However, we maintain that these descriptions are being used in their historical context for educational purposes. MOD's primary mission is to ensure the full and equal participation of all people with disabilities in all aspects of life by working to advance legal rights, maximum opportunities, supportive services, accommodations and accessibility in a manner that fosters dignity and self-determination*.

Chapter One: 1776-1900

The period from our nation's founding to the end of the Nineteenth Century saw many hardships for Americans with disabilities. Exploitation, exclusion, ignorance and poor living conditions marked this early time in U.S. history. However, the era also saw the founding of many of the country's most renowned academic institutions for people with disabilities, important inventions, and the beginning of a change in societal attitude towards disability.

Timeline: 1776-1900

1776: Founding Father Stephen Hopkins, who had cerebral palsy, is a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Hopkins served as President of the Scituate Town Council, Chief Justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court, governor of the colony, and as a delegate to the First Continental Congress. He is quoted as having stated, "my hands may tremble; my heart does not."[1]

1789: President John Adams signs the first military disability law, "the act for the relief of sick and disabled seamen."[2]

1800s: In the Nineteenth Century, "village sign languages" develop in Martha's Vineyard, MA; Henniker, NH; and Sandy River valley, ME.[3]

1805: The Father of American Psychiatry, Dr. Benjamin Rush, publishes "Medical Inquiries and Observations," the first modern documentation of mental illnesses.[4]

1811: McLean Hospital is founded in Charlestown, MA. McLean was originally a division of Massachusetts General Hospital named the "Asylum for the Insane." In 1826 the hospital was renamed "The McLean Asylum for the Insane," in honor of John McLean, a Boston merchant who left a generous donation to the hospital.[5] The famous nursery rhyme "Mary Had A Little Lamb" is about Mary Sawyer, a McLean staff member who joined in 1832.[6] Sylvia Plath, Robert Lowell, and James Taylor are among several famous people who have been treated at McLean.

1817: Connecticut Asylum for the Education and Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons, the first permanent school for the deaf in America, opened in Hartford, CT on April 15.[7] Founded by Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, Dr. Mason Cogswell, and Laurent Clerc,[8] it is known today as the American School for the Deaf.

1829: Louis Braille, a French educator, invents the raised point alphabet used by the blind and visually impaired for reading and writing known as Braille.[9]

Louis Braille

1829: Founded in Watertown, MA, Perkins is the first school for the blind in the United States.[10]

1829-Late 1800s: "Freak shows" begin to spring up in the U.S. and reach their peak in the 1840s.[11] The attractions displayed and sensationalized people with physical disabilities and often people of color to the public. Showmen such as the notable P.T. Barnum took advantage of spectators' ignorance of medical explanations for the performers' conditions and also exaggerated to further pique the audiences' interest.[12] Despite perceived exploitation, some performers enjoyed their fame and profit and successfully fought for higher pay.[13] By the end of the Nineteenth Century, the popularity of these shows began to decline with changing societal attitudes and advances in medicine.[14]

1833: The Massachusetts mental hospital, the Worcester Insane Asylum opens and admits 164 patients.[15]

1840s: American activist and advocate for the mentally ill, Dorothea Dix, who grew up in Worcester, MA, conducted an investigation of the mental health system of Massachusetts. Her report, *Memorial to the Legislature of Massachusetts*, exposed widespread abuse of people with mental illness and the horrid conditions in which they lived.[16] Dix's activism and efforts led to the establishment of the country's first mental asylums, as they were then called, including the expansion of the Worcester Insane Asylum.[17]

Dorothea Dix

1848: The infamous Fernald Development Center is established in South Boston as the Massachusetts School for the Feeble-Minded. Later moved to Waltham, it was the oldest institution that served people with developmental disabilities in the Western Hemisphere [18] until its closure in November 2014.

1844: The Association of Medical Superintendents of American Institutions for the Insane, forerunner of the American Psychiatric Association is founded.[19]

1849: The first "sheltered workshop" is established at Perkins School for the Blind.[20]

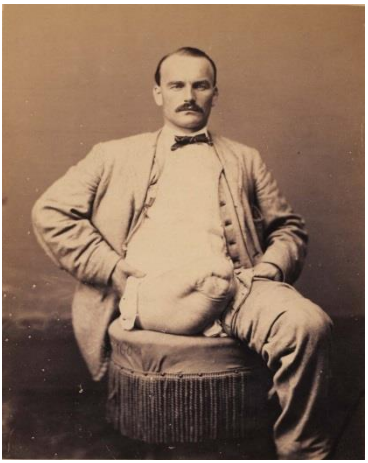
1855: The New York State Lunatic Asylum for Insane Convicts is founded to house convicted criminals with mental illness. Previously, the "criminally insane" were kept in hospitals or prisons. [21]

1860: The Braille system was introduced in the U.S.[22]

Late 1800s: "Ugly laws" sometimes known as "unsightly beggar ordinances" in many American cities and towns make it illegal for individuals with visible disabilities to merely appear in public. Violations could result in fines and even imprisonment.

1864: Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., originally a grammar school for deaf and blind children with eight students enrolled [23] was authorized by Congress and President Abraham Lincoln to grant college degrees.[24] Today Gallaudet admits both deaf and hearing students.

1861-1865: The American Civil War results in 30,000 amputations in the Union Army alone.[25]



Private Charles Myer, *Amputation of the Right Thigh*, a photograph by U.S. Army medical photographer William Bell (1830–1910) showing a leg amputee. Date:1865. Source: *Smithsonian American Art Museum online database*

1872: Alexander Graham Bell, scientist, inventor, and child of deaf parents[26] opened a speech school in Boston which admitted a large number of deaf students.[27] Bell held the view that deafness should be cured and that the deaf could be taught to speak and avoid the use of sign language.[28] Bell's experimentation with hearing devices led to his U.S. patent of the telephone.[29]

1880: Helen Keller is born on June 27th. Keller became the first deaf and blind person to attend and graduate from college and to write a book.[30] She was also a founding member of the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind.[31]

1880: The National Association of the Deaf (NAD), "the nation's premier civil rights organization of, by and for deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the United States of America"[32] was founded in Cincinnati, Ohio. NAD represents the U.S. to the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD).

1887: Helen Keller is introduced to her tutor, Anne Sullivan.[33]

1892: The American Psychological Association is founded.

1888, Helen Keller at age 8 with teacher Anne Sullivan in Cape Cod, MA. Source:, *New England Historic Genealogical Society-Boston*

Chapter Two: 1900-1960

The first half of the 20th century brought the devastation of two World Wars which sent many Americans home with permanent disabilities. The U.S. polio epidemics would leave countless more individuals with disabling conditions, many of whom would go on to lead the disability rights movement. Massachusetts was home to many important "firsts" in disability history during this time. The period also brought advancements in science and medicine as well as social programs and policies to support people with disabilities but a long road lay ahead in terms of equal access, societal attitudes towards disability and quality of life for persons with disabilities.

Timeline: 1900-1960

1904: George Eyser, the first athlete with a disability to compete in the Olympic Games, wins 6 medals for the U.S. in gymnastics in St. Louis. Eyser has a prosthetic wooden leg.[34]

1906: The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind is established on July 13 as a board of five men and women, including Helen Keller, which is charged with creating a state agency to serve the blind.[35] This original commission is centered on two "residential workshops,"[36] one for men and the other for women.[37]

1907: "Eugenic Sterilization Law" spreads with Indiana becoming the first of 24 U.S. states to pass a eugenic sterilization law for "confirmed idiots, imbeciles and rapists."[38]

1909: Geriatrics, the specialty focused on the health care of the elderly is created.[39]

1909: The first commission on aging is established in Massachusetts.[40]

1916: New York City experiences the first notable epidemic of polio in the States resulting in over 9,000 cases and 2,343 deaths.[41] The nationwide toll is 27,000 cases and 6,000 deaths.[42] Numerous Polio survivors are left with permanent disabilities and subsequently experience environmental barriers and discrimination.[43] Many will

become some of the most important leaders in the disability rights movement.[44]

1917: British World War I veteran Wilfred Owen meets poet and soldier Siegfried Sassoon who later introduces him to Robert Graves. The three men go on to create notable literary works on the subject of men disabled in battle in the "Great War."[45]

1917: Congress creates a new Veterans benefits system that includes disability compensation, insurance, and vocational rehabilitation for the disabled. This evolved in to what is known today as the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

1918: Congress passes the first major rehabilitation program for soldiers in response to the large number of WWI veterans returning with disabilities.[46]

1919: Easter Seals is founded by Edgar Allan as the National Society for Crippled Children upon learning that children with disabilities are often hidden from society.[47] In 1934 the "seal" is designed by cartoonist J.H. Donahey who was inspired by those served by the organization who asked "simply for the right to live a normal life."[48] Today, Easter Seals provides support and services to over one million children and adults with disabilities each year.[49]

Easter Seals stamps, 1930-1940s

1920: The Smith-Fess Act is signed into law by President Woodrow Wilson, establishing the Vocational Rehabilitation program for Americans with disabilities.

1921: The American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), a non-profit organization is founded with the support of philanthropist M.C. Migel, who wanted to help blind World War I veterans, and Helen Keller.[50]

1925: Iconic Mexican artist Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) is injured in a bus accident at age 18. She sustains serious bodily injuries which cause her extreme pain relapses throughout the rest of her life. She begins painting while bedridden in the aftermath her accident.[51]

1925: Samuel Orton commences an extensive study of dyslexia. He correctly hypothesizes that the condition could be neurological rather than visual.[52]

1927: In *Buck v. Bell* the Supreme Court rules that the compulsory sterilization of "defectives," including persons with intellectual disabilities is constitutional under "careful" state safeguards.[53] The ruling has never been overturned.[54]

1927: Philip Drinker and Louis Shaw invent the iron lung for polio patients undergoing treatment for respiratory muscle paralysis.[55]

Hospital staff examine a patient in an iron lung during the Rhode Island polio epidemic. Source: *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, United States Department of Health and Human Services.*

1932: Franklin D. Roosevelt becomes the 32nd president of the United States and is re-elected for four terms before dying in office in 1945. In 1921 FDR contracted polio which left him paralyzed from the waist down. [56] The President took care to conceal his disability from the public eye.

1935: League for the Physically Handicapped forms in New York City to protest discrimination by the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The League is comprised of 300 people with physical disabilities who had been turned down for WPA jobs because their applications were stamped "PH" for "physically handicapped."[57] The demonstrations draw national attention to the issue of disability employment[58] and the League is considered the first organization "of people with disabilities by people with disabilities."[59]

1935: President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs the Social Security Act into law, establishing an income for Americans who are unable to work, including people with disabilities.

1936: President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs the Randolph-Sheppard Act mandating that blind vendors be given priority to operate on federal property.[60]

President Roosevelt signs Social Security Bill on August 14, 1935.

1936: The Carroll Center for the Blind is founded. Named the Catholic Guild for All the Blind, it serves as the central office for the parish guilds in the Archdiocese of Boston.[61] Today, the Carroll Center located in Newton, MA provides vision rehabilitation services, vocational and transition programs, assistive technology training, educational support, and

recreation opportunities for individuals who have visual impairments.[62]

1937: American musician Ray Charles (1930-2004) becomes totally blind due to glaucoma at age seven.[63] He learns to use Braille to read music.[64]

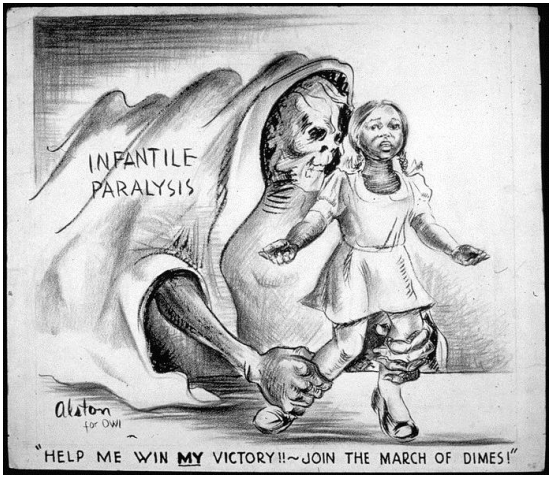
1938: The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) establishes a national minimum wage and through Section 14(c) also allows employers to pay subminimum wages to workers with disabilities for the work being performed. The floor is set at 75 percent of the national minimum wage.[65]

1938: The Wagner-O'Day Act passes, requiring federal agencies to purchase certain products made by blind individuals.[66]

1938: President Franklin Delano Roosevelt helps found the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis,[67] known today as the March of Dimes, with the task of building "an organization that could quickly respond to polio epidemics anywhere in the nation."[68] FDR's role in establishing the foundation is one reason why he is commemorated on the ten cent coin.[69]

1938: The term "Autism" as it is used today is introduced by Hans Asperger of Vienna University in his lecture on child psychology.[70]

1939: As World War II begins, Adolf Hitler orders the "mercy killing"[71] of the sick and disabled as part of the Nazi euthanasia program.



March of Dimes Poster, 1943. Source: *Office for Emergency Management. Office of War Information. Domestic Operations Branch. News Bureau, National Archives and records Administration. Artist: Charles Henry Alston, 1907-1977*

1939: Lou Gehrig Day is held at Yankee Stadium on July 4th in New York City. Gehrig (1903-1941), the first baseman known as the "Iron Horse," was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS).[72] He famously states "Today, I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of the earth."[73]

1940: The National Federation for the Blind, the largest organization of the blind in the U.S., is founded.[74]

1940-1950s: Medical and scientific experiments are conducted on developmentally disabled and non-disabled residents of Walter E. Fernald Development Center in Waltham, MA.[75] Residents of the institution and others like it at the time were incarcerated, abused, and malnourished.[76] The segregation of people with disabilities into such institutions was inspired by the eugenics movement of the early 20th century.[77] The pseudoscience would be largely discredited after World War II.[78]

1941: John F. Kennedy's sister Rosemary Kennedy has a prefrontal lobotomy as a "cure" for lifelong mild intellectual disability and aggressive behavior at age 23.[79] After the operation fails she is totally and permanently incapacitated and then institutionalized by her family.[80]

1944: Hans Asperger defines Asperger's Syndrome. Asperger identifies a pattern of behavior and abilities that he calls "autistic psychopathy."[81] Asperger refers to children with Asperger's as "little professors,"[82] because of their ability to speak on their favorite subjects in great detail and recognized that their special talents could be assets in adulthood.[83]

1945: On August 11, President Harry S. Truman approves a Congressional resolution declaring the first week in October "National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week" amidst increased public interest in the employment of people with disabilities upon the return of disabled World War II veterans.[84]

1946: The Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD) is established as "the state's chief civil rights agency charged with the authority to investigate, prosecute, adjudicate and

resolve cases of discrimination."[85] Today, the MCAD enforces the state's anti-discrimination laws for protected classes of people including persons with disabilities.

1947: Under the direction of President Harry S. Truman, state and local committees assemble to run "National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week." They campaign with movie trailers, billboards, and radio and television ads to sway the public to hire people with disabilities.[86]

1948: The Rusk Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine in New York City is founded by Dr. Howard A. Rusk. Rusk develops methods to rehabilitate injured World War II veterans. His theories become the foundation for modern rehabilitation medicine.[87] Dr. Rusk said that "The goal of total rehabilitation is to teach the physically handicapped person to live not just within the limits of his disability but to live to the hilt of his capabilities."[88]

1950s: The barrier-free movement begins in the U.S. through the efforts of U.S. Veterans Administration, the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, the National Easter Seals Society, and citizens with disabilities. The movement brings about national standards for "barrier-free" buildings.[89]

1950: The Arc For People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in founded by a small group of parents of individuals with intellectual disabilities who wished to raise their children at home rather than have them institutionalized, the typical recommendation at the time.[90]

1952: Polio epidemic results in a record 57,628 cases.[91]

1952: The first Community Mobility Program in the world to teach safe travel skills to the blind and visually impaired is created at the Carroll Center for the Blind in Massachusetts.[92]

1953: Clinical director at the Fernald Development Center in Waltham, Massachusetts, Clemens Benda conducts a radiation experiment on individuals with intellectual disabilities without consent. Benda invited 100 teenage students to participate in a

“science club” promising outings and snacks. Benda obtained parental consent for the students to be part of an experiment in which “blood samples are taken after a special breakfast meal containing a certain amount of calcium.”[93] The participants’ oatmeal was secretly laced with radioactive substances.[94]

1953: The “Father of the Independent Living movement,” Ed Roberts (1939-1995) contracts polio.[95] Roberts becomes paralyzed from the neck down with use of only a finger and sleeps in an iron lung.[96]

1954: Congress passes the Vocational Rehabilitation Amendments of 1954 which increase the scope of the VR program. VR is effective in getting thousands of people with disabilities employed. The Amendments provide funding for over 100 university-based rehabilitation programs and research that eventually leads to the establishment of the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research.[97]

1955: On April 12 it is announced that Jonas Salk had developed a polio vaccine using the March of Dimes donations of millions of Americans.[98]

1956: Congress passes the Social Security Amendments of 1956 creating the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) program for disabled workers with disabilities ages 50 to 64.[99]

Chapter Three: 1960-1990.

The 1960s saw the disability rights movement emerge in America. The following decades brought the Independent Living movement and protests against discrimination in the form of physical and social barriers. The tireless efforts of disability rights advocates over several decades would culminate in the passage of the most comprehensive civil rights law for persons with disabilities in history. Further, many important Massachusetts agencies that serve the disability community, including MOD, were established during this period.

Timeline: 1960-1990

1960: The first Paralympic Games are held in Rome, Italy.[100]

1961: The President's Panel on Mental Retardation is established by President John F. Kennedy with the purpose of addressing the needs of Americans with intellectual disabilities.[101] The Panel was renamed the "President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities" in 2003.[102]

The American Standards Association, known today as the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), publishes "Making Buildings Accessible to and Usable by the Physically Handicapped," the first accessibility standard.[103]

American musician, singer and songwriter Stevie Wonder, who is blind, signs with Motown records at age eleven.[104]

1962: The Special Olympics for individuals with intellectual disabilities is founded by Eunice Kennedy Shriver.[105]

1963: The Mental Retardation Facilities and Community Mental Health Centers Construction Act of 1963 provides funding for State Developmental Disabilities Councils, Protection and Advocacy Systems, and University Centers.[106]

1964: In California, Dr. James C. Marsters, a deaf orthodontist, and deaf scientist, Robert Weitbrecht, invent the "Baudot" code for use in teletype (TTY) communication.[107]

1967: The Massachusetts Architectural Board (AAB) is established to develop and enforce regulations designed to make public buildings in Massachusetts accessible to, functional for, and safe for use by persons with disabilities.

1968: The Architectural Barriers Act orders the removal of physical barriers to persons with disabilities, requiring that "all buildings designed, constructed, altered or leased with federal funds be made accessible."[108]

The first International Special Olympics Games are held in Chicago, Illinois.[109]

1971: Special Olympics Massachusetts is established.[110]

1972: The Massachusetts Public Education Law, Chapter 766, is passed, which today guarantees all students age 3-22 to an educational program best suited to their needs, regardless of disability. Any child who qualifies for special education services will receive services specified in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Ed Roberts, "Father of Independent Living"
Source: Northeast Independent Living Program, Inc.

1972: The Independent Living Movement is started by Ed Roberts and other University of California, Berkeley, students.[111] Roberts had quadriplegia and was denied the right to make decisions which students without disabilities were allowed to make. [112] The group founded the first Independent Living Center, the Berkeley

Center for Independent Living, on the then radical concept of an organization for people with disabilities by people with disabilities.[113]

1973: The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 makes it illegal for federal programs, federally funded or assisted programs, federal employers and federal contractors to discriminate on the basis of disability and also expands the Vocational Rehabilitation program.[114]

1974: The last "Ugly Law" in the country making it illegal for certain individuals with visible disabilities to appear in public is repealed in Chicago, Illinois, in 1974.[115]

1975: The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), later renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990, is signed into law by President Gerald Ford, requiring public schools to provide equal access to education to students with disabilities by offering a "free and appropriate education."[116]

1976: The first Winter Paralympic Games are held in Sweden.[117]

1977: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 protects Americans with disabilities from discrimination by any program or activity receiving federal assistance. The regulations are signed following large demonstrations in 10 U.S. cities, including a 150-person sit-in in San Francisco which lasted 28 days,[118] making it the longest sit-in on federal property in history.[119]

1978: The "Try Another Way" system, which endeavors to teach people with intellectual disabilities to complete complex tasks, paves the way for the Supported Employment system, which engages people with significant disabilities in meaningful work in an integrated, competitive job market with ongoing professional support.[120]

The Federal Rehabilitation Act is amended to include Title VII which provides the first federal funding for the development of a national network of Independent Living Centers.[121]

The National Council on Disability is established within the U.S. Department of Education to ensure equal opportunity, self-sufficiency, independence, inclusion and integration for people with disabilities.[122]

1979: The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is founded by two mothers of sons with schizophrenia who shared the challenges of raising a child with mental illness.[123] Today, NAMI is the largest grassroots organization in the U.S. for the improvement of the lives of people with mental illness.[124]

M.G.L. c. 272, §§ 92A and 98 prohibits discrimination in places of public accommodation in Massachusetts.

1980: The Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act allows the U.S. Department of Justice to sue state or local institutions, including mental health and treatment facilities, for violating the rights of people held against their will.[125]

1981: The Massachusetts Office on Disability is established under M.G.L. Chapter 6 Section 185 as the state advocacy agency that serves people with disabilities of all ages.

1982: "Baby Doe" an American newborn with Down syndrome dies in an incubator after doctors advise his parents not to opt for surgery to save his life.[126]

1983: A nation-wide movement for removal of barriers to transportation emerges with advocates heralding accessible transportation as vital to employment, education and community life.[127] The effort is led by ADAPT, originally known as American Disabled for Accessible Public Transit, a grassroots organization that uses nonviolent direct action,[128] and fights for lifts on buses across the country.[129]

The Massachusetts Equal Rights Law, Article 114 to the Massachusetts Constitution, makes it illegal for any program or activity in the Commonwealth to discriminate against persons with disabilities.

M.G.L. c. 151B §4 prohibits disability discrimination by Massachusetts employers with six or more employees.

1984: Discrimination on the basis of disability is added to the jurisdiction of the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD).

1985: The Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is established by Chapter 716 of the Acts of 1985 as "the principal agency in the Commonwealth on behalf of people of all ages who are deaf and hard of hearing."[130]

1986: The Air Carrier Access Act prohibits disability discrimination by domestic and foreign air carriers.

The Employment Opportunities for Disabled Americans Act improves work incentives for people with disabilities receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) by providing SSI payments and Medicaid coverage while eligible individuals try out employment.[131]

1987: The Massachusetts Disabled Persons Protection Commission is created through Massachusetts General Law Chapter 19C as the "independent state agency responsible for the investigation and remediation of instances of abuse committed against persons with disabilities in the Commonwealth."[132]

1988: The "President's Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped" is renamed "President's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities."[133]

The Gallaudet University student body, faculty, and others hold a week-long "Deaf President Now" protest on campus in Washington, D.C. to demand the appointment of a deaf president for the university.[134] As a result, Dr. I. King Jordan is made the university's first deaf president.[135]

Congress expands and renames "National Employ the Handicapped Week" as "National Disability Employment Awareness Month" now observed every October.[136]

The first modern-era Paralympic Games are held in Seoul, South Korea. American athlete Trischa Zorn won 12 Gold medals in swimming and set 9 world records.[137]

ADAPT blocks inaccessible Greyhound buses in Denver, CO.[138]
Protection from discrimination in housing under the Fair Housing Act is expanded to prohibit discrimination based on disability status under the Fair Housing Amendments Act of 1988. The Act also mandates that a certain number of accessible units be built in all new multi-family housing.[139]

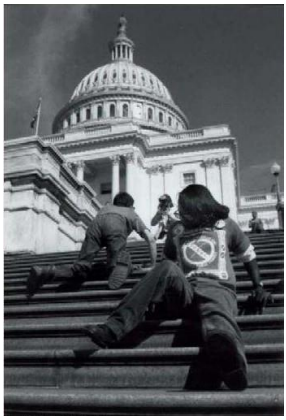
ADAPT protest inaccessible Greyhound busses in Denver. CO, 1988 . *Source: U.S. Department of Labor.*

1989: The Massachusetts Housing Bill of Rights, M.G.L. c. 151B §4, mandates non-discrimination in housing.

1990: In March, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) legislation stalls in the House Committee on Public Works and Transportation. In response, sixty protestors with disabilities crawl or drag themselves up the steps of the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. This direct action becomes known as the “Capitol Crawl.”[140]

On July 26th, 1990 President George H. W. Bush signs the ADA into law. The advocacy efforts of decades before culminated in this, "the most comprehensive disability rights legislation in history."[141] The ADA prohibits disability discrimination in employment, state and local government programs and services, places of public accommodation and telecommunications and makes it illegal to retaliate against or coerce any individual attempting to enforce their rights under the Act. Listen to remarks from the signing here.

The first Disability Pride Day is held in Boston, MA.[142]



Protesters demand action on ADA legislation by crawling up U.S. Capitol Steps in the "Capitol Crawl" March 1990. *Source: Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, mn.gov*

President George H.W. Bush signs ADA into law on South Lawn of the White House, 1990. *Source: National Archives and Records Administration*

Chapter Four: 1990-Present

Since the monumental passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990, Americans have witnessed the passage of further significant legislation which has impacted the lives of persons with disabilities. The importance of technology in daily life and employment has raised new issues in accessibility. The past twenty five years have also brought landmark Supreme Court rulings on disability and access issues. As people all over the country celebrate the 25th anniversary of the ADA, disability advocates also understand there is still work to be done.

Timeline: 1990-Present

1992: Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act stress employment as the primary goal of vocational rehabilitation (VR).[143] The Amendments order "presumptive employability," and require that consumers be afforded increased control in defining their VR goals and other aspects of VR services.[144]

The first Youth Leadership Forum for youth with disabilities is held.

The U.S. Business Leadership Network is formed to lead the national movement to include disability as part of workplace inclusion/diversity initiatives.[145]

1995: Ed Roberts, the "Father of Independent Living" dies at age 56.

1996: The Telecommunications Act requires telecommunications manufacturers and providers to "ensure that equipment is designed, developed and fabricated to be accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities, if readily achievable."[146]

1998: Section 508, part of the Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, requires federal agencies to make electronic information technology accessible to persons with disabilities.

1999: the U.S. Supreme Court rules that segregation of people with disabilities is discriminatory when integration is an appropriate option in the landmark *Olmstead v. L.C.* decision.

The Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act is signed with the aim of supporting Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income beneficiaries in transitioning to financial independence through employment.

2000: The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 are passed to improve services for people with developmental disabilities.

2001: Congress establishes the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) to focus on disability within the context of federal labor policy.[147]

2001: The Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program for Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income beneficiaries is launched.

2004: The Assistive Technology Act of 2004 reflects developments in technology and requires states to provide direct service to people with disabilities to ensure they have access to the technology they need.[148]

2007: Massachusetts Executive Order 526 EO 526 Executive Order 526 prohibits discrimination and mandates affirmative action to ensure equal opportunity for people with disabilities by the Executive Department of the Commonwealth. Responsibilities for carrying out the requirements of Executive Order 526 are divided among three different agencies: Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity (ODEO), the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD) and the Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD).

2008: The ADA Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAA) clarifies and broadens the definition of “disability,” facilitating enforcement of rights under the ADA. ADAA also defines “service animal” and addresses the topics of ticket sales and other power-driven mobility devices.

2009: The Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation, which serves individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, changes its name to the Department of Developmental Services (DDS).

2010: ADA Standards for Accessible Design create enforceable minimum accessibility standards for newly constructed or altered facilities.

President Obama signs the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act (CVAA) into law, updating federal communications law to increase the access to modern communications including new digital, broadband, and mobile innovations for persons with disabilities.

2012: NBC agrees to air coverage of the Paralympic Games on U.S. television for the first time in history.[150]

As part of a settlement of a lawsuit from a Massachusetts resident, Netflix announces plans to provide closed captioning on all streaming content.[151] A federal judge in Springfield, Massachusetts ruled that Netflix and similar online providers serving the public are required to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), marking the first ruling to recognize that internet-based companies are covered under the ADA.[152]

2014: Father-son team Dick and Rick Hoyt run their final Boston Marathon. Since 1981, Dick had been pushing his son Rick's wheelchair in the 26 mile race.[153]

The last resident of the Fernald Center in Waltham, MA was discharged on November 13 after 126 years of operation and controversy.[149]

From Sochi, the Paralympic Games are broadcast live for the first time in the U.S. with fifty hours of coverage.[154]

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), designed to improve employment services for individuals with disabilities through various reforms is signed into law by President Obama.

2015: The Americans with Disabilities Act turns 25 and disability advocates across the nation celebrate, reflect, and look towards a future filled with new and ongoing challenges. An ADA 25 celebration is held in Boston Common on July 22nd.

Thank you for your interest in U.S. disability and for commemorating Disability History Month.

ADA 25th Anniversary Celebration in Boston Common, July 22, 2015

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