

Acting together is necessary

by [Luther Granquist](#) // May 10th, 2011



In 1995 Gov. Arne Carlson's administration proposed to scale back the Tax Equity & Fiscal Responsibility Act of 1982 (TEFRA) program and to decimate personal care attendant (PCA) services. Dozens of persons with disabilities and their friends and family members, including the newly formed Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities, spoke out at the capitol and told their local lawmakers of the harm that would be done by these actions. Charlie Smith and Barb Knowlen and 18 other persons wheeled into the governor's office reception area to emphasize that point. When the legislature responded by deferring many of the cuts for a year and by requiring a task force to study the PCA program, disability advocates took the opportunity to underscore the need for and effectiveness of those services. Legislators heard how important TEFRA and PCA services

were. One after another they stood up in a 1996 floor debate to express their support for programs they voted to cut the year before.

In the 1980s, advocates, educators, and state agency personnel sought to expand early intervention services for infants with disabilities. The Minnesota State Council for the Handicapped and the Minnesota Committee for the Handicapped presented the legislature with a detailed description of early intervention programs already established and documentation of the effectiveness of those services. Local school district administrators and special education directors spoke out on the importance of these efforts. In 1987 the Minnesota Legislature expanded the scope of mandatory special education services to include children from birth to two years of age. That action, taken 30 years after Minnesota first mandated schooling for some children with disabilities, resulted from this concerted effort of advocates, parents, educators, and state agency personnel.

In 1965 the Association for Retarded Children challenged the legislature to provide increased staffing in the state institutions and to expand funding for community day programs. The association presented a detailed study of staffing needs in the institutions and graphic pictures of the men and women living there. But the association also obtained signatures throughout the state on a petition which read "I will pay taxes to help mentally retarded people." Enough petitions, in fact, so that when pasted together they formed a scroll which was dropped down from above the capitol rotunda and rolled out the capitol door. The legislature responded with increased appropriations.

Today the Republican majority in the legislature and, to a lesser extent, Governor Mark Dayton propose dire cuts in essential Medical Assistance and other social programs for persons with disabilities. The advocates from the past should inspire us to join forces, once again, to ensure

that our state will enable its citizens with disabilities to have a safe, productive, and fulfilling life.

The History Note is a monthly column sponsored by the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, www.mncdd.org and www.partnersinpolicymaking.com