

ACTION

THIS MEANS

WAR!

And We Do Mean Business...

A manual to help you organize

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For additional free copies, please contact:

**Governor's Planning Council on
Developmental Disabilities**
Minnesota State Planning Agency
300 Centennial Building
658 Cedar Street
St. Paul, MN 55155
(612) 296-4018
(612) 296-9962 TDD

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This handbook is dedicated to all individuals involved with Partners in Policymaking. Your accomplishments have been inspirational.

Many thanks to Allan Bergman, Hank Bersani, Charlotte Des Jardins, Bruce Kappel, Betty Pendler and Ed Roberts for sharing ideas. Fran Smith assembled a wealth of resource materials.

Production was completed through significant effort by Linda Beauvais, Robert Stack and Helene Vigdahl.

The Far Side cartoons were graciously provided by Andrews and McMeel, a Universal Press Syndicate Company.

January 1, 1989

ORGANIZER'S HANDBOOK

Congratulations on your enlistment into the worldwide fight to help individuals with disabilities claim their rights.

As you know, this war has a history that spans many hundreds of years. It has been marked by a series of impressive victories but has also suffered from a number of cruel setbacks. And now, thanks to the many caring individuals like you, our side is finally gaining some important ground.

During recent decades in particular, we have won several major battles. Laws have been passed to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities. An increasing number of services are becoming available to help people pursue more independent and meaningful lives. The public at large is beginning to understand and appreciate the *abilities* of persons with disabilities. And the war is gaining momentum as a record number of volunteers rally to support the cause.

But the tide has only started to turn in our favor, and we're a long way from winning the war. More laws are needed, more services are needed, more understanding is needed and more support is needed. That's why every available person — and every available army — is being called into action.

This handbook is designed to assist our *strongest and most valuable fighting forces* — consumer advocates. It offers practical suggestions on how to

- acquire basic training
- recruit volunteers
- seek out *and conquer* your enemy
- influence decision makers at all levels
- plan and execute local battles
- lend reinforcement to state and national battles
- make *and keep* important contacts
- enlist new allies

The purpose of this handbook is not to give instructions on how to vote, whom to elect or even what issues to support. It's your army, so you get to pick the battles, plan the maneuvers and mobilize your troops into action. What it does offer are common-sense tactics to use in organizing a strong, battle-ready army that can achieve the goals *you* set. After all, every battle you undertake on behalf of persons with disabilities brings all of us closer to *winning the war*.

We have selected two federal issues as examples: Medicaid Reform and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

WHY ORGANIZE?

When it comes to influencing decision makers, there's only one thing stronger than the voice of a consumer advocate: the collective voice of a group of advocates. And the better organized the group, the more powerful the voice.

Ultimately, the real power to make changes rests not with legislators and policy makers but with you, the people they serve. If you're tempted to write this off as a worthless cliché, stop and think for a minute. Simple logic will tell you that it's true. The average official — or even the above-average one — has only a general understanding of most of the issues that require decisive action. Even with the help of a trained staff, these matters are simply too numerous and too complicated to allow for intensive study of each one. As a result, these decision makers are not likely to grasp the significance of an issue, much less the constituent opinion about it — unless people speak up.

Organizing this effort is important, however. Maybe you're active in a group that supports your cause and can be organized into a fighting force. Maybe you prefer to join an existing regiment and help to make it more battle ready. But even if you're starting your own army from scratch, organization is critical. Better a small, well-coordinated army that delivers a loud, clear mandate than a large, sloppy one that creates an inaudible racket.

Knowing Your Enemy

Despite all the evidence to the contrary, your enemy is not a person or a group of persons. It's a condition. It can be found anywhere from your neighborhood to your place of business, from your school board office to your Senate chamber. It can easily exist right in your own home.

Your enemy wears many disguises. It often masquerades as fear or prejudice. It might take the form of thoughtlessness or indifference. It may even hide behind ridicule or outright cruelty. But don't be sidetracked. Only when you learn to recognize your enemy can you plan a systematic campaign to eliminate it.

Your true enemy is called ignorance.

This is not to be confused with inability to learn. Ignorance means a lack of knowledge, a state of unawareness. It may sound harmless, but it's a deadly enemy. Ignorance — on the part of neighbors, policy makers and the public at large — is the biggest obstacle standing between persons with disabilities and what is rightfully theirs: the respect and support they need to achieve maximum independence, freedom and productivity.

Fortunately, ignorance can be attacked and conquered with the right weapons. You can attack it in writing, by telephone or in face-to-face combat. Just keep in mind that the condition is your enemy, not the person who happens to have it.

ATTACK THE IGNORANCE.

Knowing Your Allies

If you feel as though your army is hopelessly small — even if you're starting out with an army of one or two — don't get discouraged. You probably have hundreds of allies, maybe even thousands, right in your own community. They simply haven't declared themselves yet.

LOOK AROUND YOU. Each person who has a disability, or who has a family member with a disability is an ally. Like you, these individuals have a stake in securing the programs and services they need in order to claim their rightful place in the community.

LOOK AGAIN. Each of those allies also has friends, neighbors, acquaintances and co-workers.

LOOK HARDER. Each of those friends, neighbors, acquaintances and co-workers has friends, neighbors, acquaintances and co-workers of their own.

Don't forget your business contacts and merchants. The "pillars of a community" can be reached through purchasing power.

Just about everybody in your community either has a personal stake in fighting for the rights of persons with developmental disabilities — or knows someone who has a personal stake in fighting for those rights.

Granted, not everyone is going to match your level of commitment to this cause. But a lot of your allies would be glad to declare themselves if someone asked them. Moreover, anyone who's willing to be an ally is only one step from being a recruit.

To get a better handle on the recruitment potential of your allies, try giving out the following no-obligation "commitment index" at your next petition drive. In fact, bring it with you to give out next time you're among the crowd waiting for a meeting to begin. Hand it out to parents waiting outside the school for the dismissal bell to ring. Distribute it at the hair stylist's, on the butcher's counter, in the waiting room at the service station, in the "break" room at work. Give it out anywhere where people are accessible — especially if they have "down time" and are just itching for something to read or to do.

Keep the commitment index brief and stress to the recipients that there is no obligation on their part.

(COPY AND DISTRIBUTE)

Volunteer Pledge

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

I have a special interest in helping individuals with disabilities to claim their rights because:

(Check any that apply.)

- I am a person with a disability
- A member of my family has a disability
- I have a friend or acquaintance with a disability
- I am a concerned citizen.

To help persons with disabilities fight for their rights, I would consider doing the following:

(Check any that apply.)

- signing petitions demanding more and better services
- circulating petitions
- writing to urge lawmakers to sponsor or support legislation
- taking part in special projects (fundraisers, hearings, etc.)
- participating in organizations or on committees

CHOOSING YOUR BATTLES

The needs are so great and so diverse that your army could attack on any number of fronts. Unless you have organized for the purpose of fighting a specific battle, you will need to set priorities. If your group is discussing possible battles, try not to talk in terms of which is most important. (They're all important.) What you're really trying to determine is what areas need to be tackled *first*, because now is the right moment. This will vary greatly according to the budget cycles that affect your community, the needs and interests of your army, the political climate of your area and many other factors.

Here are some considerations to keep in mind when you're deciding where to begin:

Some issues have a definite time element and therefore can't be put off too long, if at all. You want to influence before a decision is made, not after. (Example: Legislation to create accessible housing is up for a vote.) Threats to existing services usually deserve special attention because protecting the ground you've gained is critical. (Example: Budget cuts being proposed would eliminate job training for adults with developmental disabilities.)

Local concerns are sometimes being addressed in a larger arena. (Example: A state-funded renovation proposal would make your town's train station barrier free.)

If your army consists mainly of new recruits, they may want to "warm up" by aiding more established forces in an ongoing battle. (Example: Joining other citizens' groups and nonprofit agencies at a statewide rally or public hearing.)

BASIC TRAINING

The first step in training yourselves for combat is to become familiar with the facts, the issues and the activities related to your cause. This doesn't mean you have to pore over and memorize reams of legislation and statistics. It means you need a general understanding of the rights of persons with disabilities and the laws, attitudes and trends affecting persons with disabilities.

Possibly you or other members of your army have already collected some of the information you will need. Your background material should include copies or synopses, preferably both, of:

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142)
The Rehabilitation Act (Section 504)
The Family Rights and Privacy Act
 Copies of your state's guidelines for implementing these federal laws
 Other major federal and state legislation related to persons with disabilities
 Summaries of services provided to persons with disabilities by state agencies (Education, Human Services, Developmental Disabilities, Vocational Rehabilitation, etc.)
 Annual reports from these agencies
 Summaries of services provided to persons with disabilities by county or municipal agencies

Much of this information will be used strictly as reference material, but become familiar enough with it to know where to locate the data you need on specific issues. To keep this "library" current, monitor new legislation and activities and get copies of amendments, updated reports and other documents as they are released.

This material is usually fairly easy to obtain once you have established a good set of contacts. Before you try the public library, see what the following sources have to offer:

The Coordinating Council for Handicapped Children
 State and Local Chapters of the Association for Retarded Citizens
 State Education and Human Services Departments
 National Information Center for Handicapped Children and Youth
 State Developmental Disabilities Council
 State and Local Councils on Disability
 United Way
 League of Women Voters
 Easter Seals Society
 National Head Injury Foundation
 Epilepsy Foundation
 Independent Living Centers
 People First
 United Cerebral Palsy

Your contact file also should include the names and numbers of all federal and state legislators representing your district. In fact, try to obtain current copies of state and federal legislative directories as well. These will provide the names of all legislators as well as their committee assignments.

On the local level, you will need a listing of members of your municipal governing body, mayor, and the county governing body. In addition, get the names of all school board members and administrators for your school district. It's also helpful to have listings of officials in nearby school districts and municipalities.

Sometimes this information is consolidated into county directories, so check your county office of public affairs and your county school board office to see if listings are available. For each governing body or school board, try to keep track of the following information:

- when and where regular meetings are held
- accessibility of the meeting sites
- where special meetings are advertised
- when elections are held
- when the budget is scheduled for introduction and approval

P.S. Municipal clerks and board secretaries are usually the best place to start.

MARSHALLING YOUR RESOURCES

Before you can divide the labor, your army needs to take inventory and identify its collective skills, talents and current weaponry.

For example, find out if anyone has ability in:

- reading legislation
- public speaking
- word processing
- graphic design
- fund raising
- organizing transportation
- writing
- record keeping
- photography
- press release
- phone trees

Contacts are equally important, and chances are that members of your group have some valuable ones. Check for contacts among:

- legislators on all levels, their staffs, and their families
- contributors to the campaigns of elected officials
- school boards and administration
- government and non-profit agency employees
- newspapers, radio and television stations
- local print shops

Others may be able to contribute items or have access to important services. See if anyone can provide:

- use of a computer
- a place to meet
- TDD
- transportation to rallies
- access to a copy machine
- Fax machine
- respite care

For morale's sake, your army may prefer to assert its identity and test its strength by beginning with a manageable solo maneuver. (Example: Presenting a petition for a barrier-free voting booth to the town council.)

In the interest of compromise or convenience, more than one battle can be fought simultaneously. (Example: Circulating a petition seeking more federal funding for community-based services and a fact sheet on the benefits of hiring employees with disabilities.)

Writing Tactics

Written attacks have several important advantages, especially when you're dealing with decision makers who are often unavailable for discussions and always pressed for time. Communicating by mail gives you the opportunity to:

- make contact with hard-to-reach people
- state your position without interruptions
- provide your reader with important information that can be remembered and referred to again.
- document your requests, ideas and complaints
- gain clout through repeated correspondence as your name becomes more familiar and "your" file in the reader's office gets thicker.
- ask a question that requires an answer
- many people writing from different locations give elected officials the impression that they are surrounded.

Many of the same advantages apply to your constant search for new allies and potential recruits. Your target may not have time to discuss your cause in detail during a conference, a canvassing mission or a chance meeting. (In fact, *you* might not always have time if you're in the thick of a campaign.) But a concise, easy-to-read handout can do the job for you.

If your army is like most, passing this ammunition will come much easier than assembling it. This is especially true if the material has to be written from scratch. Luckily, your basic training will have provided you with a list of contacts who will probably be willing to forward plenty of literature to aid your cause. Sometimes this material can be used verbatim, particularly if your battle is part of a larger effort on the state or national level. But to be on the safe side, here are a few tips to keep in mind:

- Read the material thoroughly. Even a responsible organization isn't immune to making factual errors, much less typos, in its literature. If you're distributing the material, the mistakes are *your* responsibility. Avoid the appearance of plagiarism. Credit the group that produced the material by leaving its name on the piece instead of replacing it with your own.
- Double check for outdated information such as legislation, listed as pending, that has since been passed.
- Watch out for the quality of your copies, especially if the piece you receive looks fuzzy or is printed on colored paper. A blurry, unreadable piece of literature will get trashed quicker than a used styrofoam cup. Resist the temptation to copy and distribute too much literature. If you aren't selective, you'll wind up overloading people with materials — and chances are that none of it will get read.

Sometimes it's better, and easier in the long run, to rewrite the material or simply use it as background information for creating your own literature. This is especially true in cases where:

- your own army wants more visibility
- your campaign is close to home and calls for more localized information
- the material you get contains too many errors and/or outdated facts.
- existing material is too long and involved for your audience and needs to be pared down.

A simple fact sheet about the issue you are undertaking is generally the most valuable piece of literature you can produce. It should list the following information:

- A brief summary of the issue
- The purpose of your campaign
- The group of people affected
- Other groups supporting your position
- An address or phone number where more information can be obtained and the name of your group (if it seems appropriate)

If your group is trying to attain more visibility, particularly if you are trying to attract members, you might want to write up a separate fact sheet. This should list:

- The name of your group (not just initials or acronym)
- Where it is based
- Its purpose
- Who is eligible to join
- The approximate membership count
- The composition of your group (parents, teachers, a variety of concerned citizens, etc.)
- A number to call for more information

When you're undertaking a battle, however, remember the goal is to win, not get credit. In other words, if only one fact sheet is going to be handed out, save your group sheet for another time.

The Petition: A Good Written Attack

Petitions are a good tactic because they give you a vehicle to gather support quickly and efficiently, with a minimum of effort on the part of your allies. They also have the advantage of being very economical, since the names and addresses of hundreds of supporters can be sent in one envelope. In addition, they can provide you with a ready reference list of some of your allies.

Here's how a petition to your Congressional representative might read:



(Circulate petitions with one or two names already on it. Many people are unwilling to be the first to sign.)

THE LETTER:

A Better Written Attack

An individually signed letter carries more clout with legislators than a signature on a petition. Many people may be willing to write but either can't find the time or don't know what to say. Have a form letter ready for them to sign so that you can strike while the iron is hot. With some minor revisions, the message in your petition can be transferred to an individual letter.

Dear Representative _____:

I am a concerned citizen with a strong interest in safeguarding the rights of persons with developmental disabilities. Therefore, I urge you to support Medicaid reform legislation that will allow our state officials to make Medicaid-funded services available to individuals within the community. Once the institutional bias is removed from the program and our state gains more flexibility in using its funds, thousands of persons can lead the meaningful lives they deserve.

Medicaid reform will be an important step in expanding the community services system needed to help persons with disabilities meet their full potential for independence and become active, contributing members of society.

Please join me in this important fight.

Thank you for your attention.

THE PERSONAL LETTER:

The Best Written Attack

When it comes to making a strong statement, nothing is more persuasive than a personal letter — a letter that tells your story and lets the decision maker see the importance of the issue from your point of view. It doesn't have to be long or complicated or stylishly written. All it has to do is give the reader insight into the urgency of your request and an awareness of you as a flesh-and-blood constituent.

If it seems like an overwhelming task, remember that even a highly personal letter can follow a basic formula:

- ☐ Identify yourself, your place of residence and your phone number
- ☐ Tell your story *briefly*
- ☐ State your position
- ☐ Make your request
- ☐ Emphasize what it will mean to you *and many others*
- ☐ Thank the reader
- ☐ Ask for a response
- ☐ Offer to provide more information and materials

Dear Representative _____:

My name is _____ and I am a resident of _____ I have a special interest in fighting for the rights of persons with disabilities because _____

Therefore, I urge you to support Medicaid reform legislation that will allow our state officials to serve _____ and other citizens with developmental disabilities more effectively within the community. Once the institutional bias is removed from the Medicaid program and our state gains more flexibility in using its funds, thousands of persons like _____ can lead the meaningful lives they deserve.

Medicaid reform will be an important step in helping _____ and many others meet their full potential for independence and become active, contributing members of society. Please join us in this important fight.

Thank you for your attention.

Dear Representative Jones:

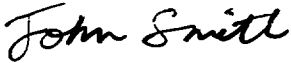
My name is John Smith and I am a resident of Anytown. I have a special interest in fighting for the rights of persons with disabilities because I have a 36-year-old son named Jim who has cerebral palsy. He uses a wheelchair and is very energetic and outgoing. Jim's been on the waiting list for a job-training program for two years, but he's still determined to get a job and be self-reliant. I'm doing what I can to help, but we're both racing against time. Jim lives with me, but I'm 74 years old, and I'm the only family Jim has. I won't be able to provide a home for him much longer, and the waiting list for barrier-free housing is even longer than the waiting list for training. I'm told that my state doesn't have enough funds to go around.

Therefore, I urge you to support Medicaid reform legislation that will allow our state officials to serve Jim and other citizens with developmental disabilities more effectively within the community. Once the institutional bias is removed from the Medicaid program and our state gains more flexibility in using its funds, thousands of persons like Jim can lead the meaningful lives they deserve.

Medicaid reform will be an important step in helping Jim and many others meet their full potential for independence and become active, contributing members of society. Please join us in this important fight.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,



John Smith

Not everyone will be willing to go the extra mile and make a personal pitch. But every personal letter you can garner will help tremendously by building the reader's awareness of the issue. If every member of your army writes a personal letter, your reader will learn that this issue deeply affects dozens — maybe thousands — of individuals. It's the strongest written ammunition that you can possibly use to *attack the ignorance*.

The best way to get your corps of letter writers in gear is to provide them with copies of a basic formula that they can personalize to communicate their point of view on the issue.

Here's how the previous form letter to your Congressional representative might be translated into a formula:

Here's how the formula might look with the blanks filled in:

Instructions for Writing Letters of Discrimination.

The American With Disabilities Act (ADA) was introduced on April 29, 1988 by Sen. Lowell Weicker and many co-sponsors, including Rep. Major Owens. It is designed to extend the protections of Civil Rights and equal opportunity of access in Housing, Transportation, Employment, Public Accommodations, Services, and other areas.

In order to demonstrate our support of the Americans with Disabilities Act we must write letters to our Congressional Representatives in both the House and Senate. We must generate a sufficient volume of letters so that we can make a major impact. We need to clearly demonstrate that this legislation is essential, and that we expect it to be passed in a timely manner.

Help enact ADA by writing letters to your Congressional Representatives. Then recruit 5 friends to write, and have them recruit 5 friends to write, and have them recruit 5 more. This way we can generate the massive support necessary to motivate Congress to pass this legislation.

The opening paragraph of the letter should include your name, address, phone number, disability, employment status, and organizational affiliation. The second paragraph should relate your personal experience with or knowledge of discrimination. End the letter with the question, "Is there some Federal law which protects me in this situation?"

When you write to your Congressional Representatives and ask this specific question, they MUST RESPOND to you with a researched answer, which means your letter gets recorded and not simply filed.

Address your letter to:

Rep. XXXX XXXX
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Sen. XXXX XXXX
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Please mail a copy to Justin Dart, Chairperson, Task Force on the Rights and Empowerment of Americans with Disabilities, 907 6th Street, S.W., Suite 516C, Washington, DC 20024.

Please send these letters as soon as possible. Thank you for your assistance in this monumental undertaking.

Dear Representative _____:

My name is Jim Smith, and I am a resident of Anytown. I have the strongest possible interest in ensuring that the Americans with Disabilities Act is passed in Congress this year.

As you know, the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability by employers, housing providers, transportation agencies, the government, the media and managers of public facilities. This could open up a whole new world to persons like me, who have never known a day free of discrimination based on our disabilities.

Discrimination, intentional or otherwise, touches every phase of my life. At age 36, I still live in my parents' house because I have cerebral palsy and have been consistently shut out of the work force. I spend my days reading, doing housework, stuffing envelopes for pocket money, circling want ads and checking to see if the waiting lists for barrier-free housing and supported work programs have gotten any shorter. Simple activities like catching a bus are amazingly complicated. I might spend hours watching one bus pass because it has no wheelchair lift and two more pass because the drivers didn't notice me or decided I wasn't worth their time.

Over the years, too many job sites, housing facilities, theaters, restaurants and museums have been off limits to me. So were my cousin's wedding reception, my niece's graduation ceremony and dozens of events other people take for granted.

I'm overjoyed that discrimination against people like me may soon be declared illegal. But that joy will be short lived unless legislators like you use all your influence to pass the Americans with Disabilities Act as soon as possible.

Thank you for your attention and support.

Telephone Tactics

Making contact by telephone can be very effective, especially when it comes to communicating with your army. To begin with, set up a "telephone tree," a communication route from one member to the next, and standardize it. When a special meeting is called, an activity is cancelled or some other important message has to make the rounds, everyone can rely on being contacted if your telephone tree is in good working order.

One of the biggest advantages of the telephone tree is that it can act as a substitute for meetings. One of the most frequent complaints about organizations of all kinds is that members get "meetinged to death." Telephone contact can save everyone the trouble of convening a meeting just for a few agenda items. It can also help members to "keep each other honest" during those periods when we're all tempted to keep putting off assignments.

Remember the old gossip game and how messages get distorted. Keep the message consistent from one person to the next so it comes out like it starts.

Telephone contact with the officials you want to influence should be saved for important situations, unless you know the person well and have established a good phone rapport. As a rule, try to restrict calling to matters where a mail communication won't reach the person in time, questions that need an immediate response and requests to arrange or confirm dates for personal meetings.

MEETING IN PERSON

Being in the right place at the right time can allow you the chance to make invaluable personal contact with potential supporters. The right place can be anywhere from a planned visit to a senator or a public hearing to an unscheduled meeting at the mall or school parking lot. The right time is whenever you feel comfortable talking and your target is willing to listen.

Like telephone calls, visits to busy officials and administrators should be saved for the most important matters. Don't be apologetic about requesting a visit because you are a taxpayer and a constituent. But be sure to use the time well and don't use any more of it than the person is willing to spare. Remember, an official's attention span may not be more than 10 minutes.

Actually, the same principle applies to the people you encounter face to face in your recruitment drives, your letter writing campaigns and your other public-awareness missions. That's why timing, approach and the ability to "read" people are critical.

But whether you're trying to persuade a state legislator to pass a bill or trying to persuade your mechanic to write a letter to that same legislator, your personal contact will probably follow pretty much the same formula:

- Identify yourself and your position
 - Briefly state your request
 - Ask for support and get a commitment
 - Answer any questions you can
 - Offer to find the answers you don't know
 - Thank the person for his or her time
 - Leave an information sheet or *light* packet
- (See attached ADA Fact Sheet as an example)

FACT SHEET

about the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1988

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1988 was a key recommendation of the National Council on the Handicapped in its 1986 report, *Toward Independence*. The Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of handicap in areas such as employment, housing, public accommodations, travel, communications, and activities of State and local governments.

The Act covers employers engaged in commerce who have 15 or more employees; housing provider covered by Federal fair housing laws; public accommodations; transportation companies; those engaged in broadcasting or communications; and State and local governments.

The Act specifically defines discrimination, including various types of intentional and unintentional exclusion; segregation; inferior or less effective services, benefits or activities; architectural, transportation, and communication barriers; failing to make reasonable accommodations; and discriminatory qualifications and performance standards.

The Act specifies those actions that do not constitute discrimination. They include unequal treatment wholly unrelated to a disability or that which is the result of legitimate application of qualifications and performance standards necessary and substantially related to the ability to perform or participate in the essential components of a job or activity.

The Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board will issue minimum accessibility guidelines. Other regulations will be issued by the Attorney General, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, the Secretary of Transportation, the Federal Communications Commission, and the Secretary of Commerce. The Act will not repeal Sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and all regulations issued under those sections will remain in full force and effect.

Enforcement procedures include administrative remedies, a private right of action in Federal court, monetary damages, injunctive relief, attorney's fees, and cutoffs of Federal funds.

Public Speaking

Public speaking, at a hearing for example, is an opportunity to influence many people at once and calls for only slightly different tactics. The main difference, though, is that you will be able to speak your thoughts if you feel more comfortable. Although some advise against it, reading a prepared statement is much better than forgetting your ideas because you tried to be spontaneous. Just be sure to find out in advance:

- Whether public participation is allowed
- Whether you need to be placed on the agenda beforehand
- Whether your comments will have a time limit or whether they must be written and submitted in advance
- Whether you will be allowed to speak a second time to answer questions or comments that follow.

Try to get a consensus from your group as to which members will act as spokespeople. Sometimes it's appropriate for more than one to speak, but others should be enlisted as backup speakers. This comes in particularly handy at meetings where each participant is allowed only one turn, and your position needs to be restated or clarified later in the proceedings. *Never* sign up to speak at a public hearing or conference without one alternate, and preferably two, in reserve.

Like your letters or one-to-one discussions, your statements should be courteous, brief and to the point:

Good evening. My name is _____
 _____ and I am a resident of
 _____. I'm here today on
 behalf of _____ to
 request that you _____.
 This issue affects approximately _____
 individuals with disabilities in this *town/*
county/state because it will _____
 _____. Thank
 you for giving me the opportunity to speak,
 and I will try to answer any questions you
 might have.

Why Organize?

When it comes to influencing decision makers, there's only one thing stronger than the voice of a consumer advocate: the collective voice of a group of advocates. And the better organized the group, the more powerful the voice to answer any questions you might have.

Cartoons by **GARY LARSON**.

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