



Independent Living for Iowans with Disabilities

Twelve years ago, America committed itself to the principle that disability does not limit a person's right to participate in the cultural, economic, educational, political, and social mainstream. We made that

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commitment when the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became the law of the land. Authoring the ADA and shepherding its passage along with former President George Bush and Senator Bob Dole was one of the proudest achievements of my life.

This landmark civil rights law ensures that people with disabilities have equal access to businesses, public transportation and other public facilities. In short, the ADA is about ensuring that people with disabilities have an equal chance at living the American Dream.

The twelfth anniversary of the ADA is a time to celebrate our accomplishment and to thank the thousands of disability rights advocates who helped make it happen. It is also a time to rededicate ourselves to the principles of the ADA by taking the next step forward for the rights of people with disabilities. There is a great deal of work left to do.

One of the largest remaining barriers is the lack of access to community-based services that allow Americans with disabilities to live independently in their own homes. Just ask Ken Kendall of Iowa City.

At the young age of 17, Ken Kendall was injured in a serious accident. He suffered the same spinal cord injury as Christopher Reeve, who played Superman, and like Reeve, he needs a ventilator to breathe. With the help of community-based services covered by his insurance company, Ken was able to continue living at home in Iowa City. Remaining independent made a tremendous difference in his life.

Two years ago, however, Ken lost his health insurance. At first, he was able to patch together services so he could continue to live at home. Unfortunately, those services dried up. Now on Medicaid, his only option is to live in a nursing home in Waterloo, almost two hours away from his friends and family in Iowa City.

Improving access to community-based personal attendant care services is the next step forward for people with disabilities like Ken Kendall. If Medicaid offered this choice, Ken could continue to live at home near his family and friends. Additionally, Ken estimates that receiving care at home could save Medicaid and Medicare as much as \$2000 each month. Offering personal attendant services as an option would be best for Ken and save money.

That is why I have joined my Republican colleague, Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA), in introducing legislation that would allow Ken and others like him the choice to live independently. Our bipartisan bill, the Medicaid Community Attendant Services and Supports Act, or MiCASSA, would allow any person on Medicaid receiving assistance in a nursing facility or an intermediate care facility to receive community attendant services and supports. This includes individuals with disabilities as well as seniors.

There is no substitute for being able to live at home, close to your friends and family, and not in a nursing care setting. On this, the twelfth anniversary of the ADA, we should recommit ourselves to the right of all Americans with disabilities to participate in the cultural, economic, educational, political, and social mainstream. We can do that by passing MiCASSA.