



Speaking out for people  
with intellectual disabilities

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **Augusta Citizen Elected Co-President of National Organization for People with Intellectual Disabilities**

Long-time Augusta resident, Ann Knighton, has been elected to lead VOR, a national advocacy organization for people with intellectual disabilities. She will serve as the organization's co-President, through June, with Sybil Finken from Glenwood, Iowa.

Knighton is a long-time disability advocate. She has been affiliated with VOR for many years, serving first as VOR's Georgia State Coordinator. She joined the VOR Board of Directors in 2006 and was elected as VOR's Second Vice President shortly thereafter. Earlier this year, she was recognized by the organization for more than 50 years of advocacy for people with intellectual disabilities.

"I was honored and surprised to receive the prestigious VOR *Voice Award*," said Knighton, who received the award at VOR's national conference in Washington, D.C. this June. "I've been advocating for 50 years, yet there is so much more to do. I appreciate the award very much, but my work is not done."

Knighton's decades of advocacy have been focused nationally and in Georgia. In Augusta, she is a staunch supporter of East Central Georgia Regional Hospital ("Gracewood"), a licensed residential program for people with profound intellectual disabilities, where her daughter, Erica, is a resident.

Erica, who is severely disabled due to a chromosome abnormality, requires assistance in every aspect of daily living at all times. "At Gracewood, Erica can be all she can be," remarked Knighton. "She's so well-cared for and happy. Her happiness, good care and comfort, are all I ask for. That's why I advocate – so Erica and her peers receive the services they need to survive every day."

The trend nationally is to move away from large residential centers in favor of smaller settings in the community. In Georgia, the state and federal government have threatened to close Gracewood in favor of smaller home. VOR is the only national organization that challenges this trend, supporting instead an array of services from family home, to smaller neighborhood homes, to larger residential communities, like Gracewood.

"I'm glad to have VOR's support in my fight to save Gracewood. VOR feels strongly – and has for 27 years since it was first founded – that one size does not fit all," said Knighton. "Erica is not a good candidate for a small, unlicensed home. The lack of oversight and staff training would present significant worries for me as a parent and put Erica and the other Gracewood residents at risk due to their very complex medical and care needs. Gracewood is federally-certified to care for people with complex needs."

"I do recognize that a smaller setting is right for some people," added Knighton. "A parent knows best; I would never in my advocacy threaten or question another parent's choice. That's what I love most about VOR – respect for individual and family decision-making."

Knighton and Finken will share the position of President through June 2012, when the next election will be held. Knighton was not shy to sing Finken's praises.

"I've served with Sybil on the VOR Board of Directors for many years. She is a very dedicated and talented advocate. Our respective strengths complement one another; we'll make a great team."

To learn more about VOR, please visit [www.vor.net](http://www.vor.net).

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