



Speaking out for people with intellectual & developmental disabilities



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VOR Weekly News Update

News and views for VOR Advocates

Year-End Giving Reminder:

Together advocacy can change lives! For all of you have already given a year-end gift to VOR, **THANK YOU!** If not, please consider a year-end at this time! As a VOR supporter you count on us because you know VOR is the only national organization that will truly represent all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

"I will say it again: 'Thank You' VOR for all that you do for the cause, not just our specific cause, but everyone's. I think that VOR is awesome. I cannot even imagine where we would all be without your unending and fabulous help and guidance." ~

L.K., VOR Member

The VOR Update will be taking a Holiday Break. The next issue will be published Friday, January 9, 2015. Best wishes for a safe and happy holiday season.

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VOR and YOU

1. BREAKING NEWS: Congress "strongly" urges the Department of Justice to factor individual needs and choice into Americans with Disabilities Act enforcement actions

2. THANK YOU VOR! Two more VOR Board Members add their "video thanks" to VOR's website

3. Wyoming: VOR and affiliate Friends of Wyoming Life Resource Center submit joint response to Facilities Task Force Report and Recommendations

FEDERAL UPDATE

4. Congress sends Obama bipartisan bill to help disabled save for expenses with tax-free accounts

5. U.S. Senate inaction on disability rights dismays Harkin

STATE NEWS

6. California: State facility's closing draws curtain on a California career

7. Last residents at Woodbridge Developmental Center moved out by Christie administration

AUTISM NEWS

8. Researchers Identify Autism 'Thought-Marker'

About VOR



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Reminders:
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QUOTABLE, a Chinese Proverb Calendar Reminders

VOR and YOU

1. BREAKING NEWS: Congress "strongly" urges the Department of Justice to factor individual needs and choice into Americans with Disabilities Act enforcement actions

VOR * For Immediate Release * December 16, 2014

VOR is pleased to report that the following language relating to Department of Justice appropriations was included in the Conference Report to accompany the recently passed Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015:

"Deinstitutionalization.-There is a nationwide trend towards deinstitutionalization of patients with intellectual or developmental disabilities in favor of community-based settings. The Department is strongly urged to continue to factor the needs and desires of patients, their families, caregivers, and other stakeholders, as well as the need to provide proper settings for care, into its enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities Act."

VOR is grateful to **Rep. Adam Schiff (D-CA)** for championing this report language. We are also grateful to **Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD)** and **Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA)**, who chair the Senate and House Appropriations' Subcommittees on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies for their support of this necessary language.

VOR has long been concerned about the Department of Justice's Americans with Disabilities Act enforcement actions, purportedly in furtherance of the U.S. Supreme Court's [Olmstead v. L.C.](#) decision. We have urged the Department of Justice to adhere to individual choice, according to need and family input, when enforcing *Olmstead* as required by *Olmstead*.

We brought these same concerns to Senate and House appropriators. The approved report language strongly urges the Department of Justice to consider individual need and choice - as required by *Olmstead* - and the input of families, in decisions impacting an individual's ability to access necessary services and supports in proper care settings.

VOR will continue to build on this progress in the next Congress.

For more details and links related to the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015, visit <http://docs.house.gov/floor/> (scroll down to Senate Amendment to H.R. 83). [The report language is at the Division B \(page 17\) found here.](#)

2. THANK YOU VOR: Two more VOR Board Members add their "video thanks" to VOR's website

VOR Board Members Terry Kopansky and Gil Fonger are the latest VOR leaders to say "thanks VOR" through video. Check out their videos and

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others on [VOR's website](#).

3. VOR and affiliate Friends of Wyoming Life Resource Center submit joint response to Facilities Task Force Report and Recommendations

VOR * December 16, 2014

A Task Force analyzing the role of Wyoming's state-run facilities for seniors, people with disabilities, and veterans presented its final report and [recommendations](#) to the legislature at a Tuesday meeting of the Joint Labor, Health and Social Services committee in Cheyenne.

Shawn Humberson, VOR's Co Wyoming State Coordinator and member of the task force analyzing the role of Wyoming's state-run medical facilities, presented VOR/Friends joint statement to the legislature earlier this week, responding to the Task Force's recommendations.

[Read the VOR/Friends of Wyoming Life Resource Center response here.](#)

[Read related news: Task force report to be taken up in interim \(Casper Star Tribune, December 17, 2014\)](#)

FEDERAL UPDATE

4. Congress sends Obama bipartisan bill to help disabled save for expenses with tax-free accounts

AP, December 16, 2014

WASHINGTON — Congress gave final approval Tuesday to the most sweeping legislation to help the disabled in a quarter century, allowing Americans with disabilities to open tax-free bank accounts to pay for needs such as education, housing and health care.

Modeled after tax-free college savings accounts, the ABLE bill would amend the federal tax code to allow states to establish the program.

To qualify, a person would have to be diagnosed by age 26 with a disability that results in "marked and severe functional limitations"; those who are already receiving Social Security disability benefits would also qualify. Families would be able to set up tax-free accounts at financial institutions, depositing up to \$14,000 annually to pay for long-term needs such as education, transportation and health care.

The contributions would be in after-tax dollars but earnings would grow tax-free. The ABLE accounts would be able to accrue up to \$100,000 in savings without the person losing eligibility for government aid such as Social Security; currently, the asset limit is \$2,000. Medicaid coverage would continue no matter how much money is deposited in the accounts.

[Read more, comment and share](#)

[VOR supported the ABLE Act](#)

5. U.S. Senate inaction on disability rights dismays Harkin

Sen. Tom Harkin is dismayed that his effort to extend the protections of the Americans with Disabilities Act to the international community appears unlikely to gain the Republican support it needs to be ratified by the U.S. Senate.

Harkin had hoped to win over another half dozen Republicans to reach the 67 votes necessary to ratify the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD).

However, a GOP ally did a vote count and said there has been no movement among the Republican holdouts despite encouragement from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Business Roundtable, veterans groups and disabilities groups.

Based on the vote count, Harkin said, "There no way we can bring it up."

Harkin has made the expansion of opportunities and rights for people with disabilities a major emphasis of his 30 years in the Senate. He had hoped to win ratification of the CRPD before retiring in January.

[Read more, comment and share](#)

[VOR took no position on CRPD](#)

STATE NEWS

6. California: State facility's closing draws curtain on a California career

Sacramento Bee * December 11, 2014

Soon after the last resident leaves Lanterman Developmental Center this month, Brad Whitehead will end nearly 37 years with the state, every day of it as a psychiatric technician at the Pomona facility.

Whitehead was a laid-off 21-year-old steelworker when he joined the state's psychiatric technician apprenticeship program.

"I thought I'd work here three to five years and move on," he said. "Then I realized, 'Wow, I love what I do.'"

[Read more, comment and share](#)

VOR Editor's Note: Brad Whitehead, who is featured in his article, has dedicated his career to both serving and advocating for the people he supported at Lanterman Developmental Center. For the past 10 years or more, Brad has taken this advocacy to Washington, D.C., representing VOR and the California Association of Psychiatric Technicians (CAPT), at VOR's Annual Conference and Initiative. We are grateful to Brad and so appreciate his friendship, professionalism, and advocacy on behalf of all people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

7. Last residents at Woodbridge Developmental Center moved out by Christie administration

NJ.Com * December 12, 2014

The last three residents at the state-run Woodbridge Developmental Center were transferred to their new homes today, three weeks ahead of

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the Christie administration's goal to close the nearly 50-year-old facility for people with developmental disabilities, a state spokeswoman confirmed.

The Woodbridge facility closure is part of Gov. Chris Christie's push to develop more privately operated community housing and rely less on state institutions. But most of the people with intellectual and developmental disabilities displaced from these two centers have moved to one of the five remaining institutions. Seventy percent of former Woodbridge

Developmental Center residents moved to another center, 25 percent relocated to group homes and supervised apartments, according to the Department of Human Services, which operates the centers.

For Joanne St. Amand, who was president of the Woodbridge Developmental Center Parents Association, "today was a sad day, and a heartache for families."

She said she is in contact with many families whose adult children or siblings were moved hours away in Cumberland and Cape May counties and lament they can't visit as often as they used to. About 80 percent of displaced Woodbridge residents were transferred to the three centers in south Jersey, according to the state.

[Read more, comment and share](#)

AUTISM NEWS

8. Researchers Identify Autism 'Thought-Marker'

Disability Scoop * December 3, 2014

Autism diagnosis currently relies on clinical evaluation, but a new study suggests it may be possible to detect the disorder with near perfect accuracy using brain scans.

Researchers say they were able to identify "thought-markers" — or differences in the way the brain responds to certain thoughts — specific to those with autism. The method was successful in identifying whether or not a person had autism with 97 percent accuracy, according to findings published

<http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0113879> Tuesday in the journal PLOS ONE.

[Read more, comment and share](#)

Quotable

"When the winds of change blow, some people build walls, and others build windmills." ~ Chinese Proverb

**May your New Year be full of many windmills.
From all of us at VOR to you -
Happy New Year!**

Calendar Reminders:

Tuesday, March 24, 2015:

[**American Health Care Association ID/DD Washington Fly-In**](#)

Congressional speakers are being invited, a legislative update will be provided. and Hill visits will follow in the afternoon. Breakfast and a

boxed lunch will be provided to you. [Registration is free but required.](#)

VOR members are encouraged to attend.

Sunday, June 7, 2015:

VOR Annual Conference: ADVOCATING FOR CHOICE BY EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES. Speakers Announced. Registration details coming soon. Check [VOR's website often for updates.](#)

Archives:

* Thursday, March 20, 2014

[VOR's "Regional Meetings: The Need for Advocates to Act Global and Local" Webinar.](#)

***Social Media Strengths: Using Facebook and Twitter to Advance Your Cause (VOR, July 2013).** [Visit VOR's website for a copy of the powerpoint presentation and an audio of the event.](#)

* **How Congress Works Webinar: [Recorded - Listen Here.](#)** Tuesday, April 23, 2013 - 12:00 pm central / 1:00 pm eastern. How Congress Works: The Basics. Hosted by Peter Kinzler and Larry Innis.

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