

## **History Note: Protection and advocacy were a key civil rights step**

by [Access Press Staff](#) // December 10th, 2013

Through its series Moments in History, the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities is leading up to the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Through written content, photos, posted documents, video and audio links, history of the disability rights movement comes alive for all to enjoy. The council plans to post 31 history stories in the months ahead. Almost a dozen stories are now available online. Go to <http://mn.gov/mnddc/> and scroll down to the ADA Legacy Project. Click on the heading and find the link to each of the histories.

The ADA passed Congress in 1990 and is marking its silver anniversary in 2015. But many other pieces of state and federal legislation led up to its passage. One of these precursors, the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (known as the DD Act) was passed in 1975 to address and protect the legal, civil and human rights of people with disabilities. The act was passed thanks to the efforts of self-advocates from Minnesotans and many leaders including the late Elizabeth Boggs, Ph.D.

Boggs not only held a doctoral degree, she was also a parent, nuclear physicist, president of the developmental disability advocacy group then called NARC, and member of President John F. Kennedy's President's Panel. Explore the online history and learn how this remarkable woman is described by Allan Bergman, a nationally recognized leader in influencing the development of federal and state policy relating to best practice services and supports for persons with disabilities.

It took years to get the act adopted. In 1973, Sen. Jacob Javits, serving as Senator Pro Tempore of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Subcommittee on the Handicapped, held a hearing regarding an extension of the DD Act to establish, among other things, standards to protect individuals with developmental disabilities living in residential facilities.

Javits was part of a small group of liberal Republicans who were often isolated ideologically from their mainstream Republican colleagues. He was strongly committed to social issues, believing that the federal government should have a role in improving the lives of Americans, including those with disabilities.

Cliff Poetz, a self-advocate from Minnesota; Donald Bartlette, director of the Outreach Community Center, and Dennis Haggerty, member of the National Advisory Council on Developmental Disabilities testified in support of the legislation. Highlights of their testimony can be found through the web link. Readers should be aware that the language and terminology used goes back to the 1970s, and is now outdated and considered offensive. At the time, however, it was acceptable and is retained for its historical significance.

Reading his comments in the written summary of testimony, it is obvious that Javits was moved by those he heard from at the hearing. He praised the speakers and agreed with their points.

*The History Note is a monthly column sponsored by the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, [www.mncdd.org](http://www.mncdd.org) and [www.partnersinpolicymaking.com](http://www.partnersinpolicymaking.com)*