



As we approach the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), it is a time to celebrate and reflect on this moment. How quickly the years have gone by, and how many changes have occurred because of the ADA. Access in the community has greatly improved, access to live in the community has improved, and so many other little and big changes in our society can be directly linked to the passage of the ADA.

Looking back 25 years, sitting on the south lawn of the White House in Washington DC, with over 2500 other advocates who had worked tirelessly for 5 years to get the ADA passed, we watched President Bush sign the law. One can still feel the emotions of the crowd to know that finally, we were equal Americans with the same civil rights that all Americans share today. I have been an advocate for 40 plus years, but that day - July 26, 1990 - was the day that I got my civil rights as an American.

The ADA is an important part of the civil rights laws of this nation. It covers employment, access to state and local government, public accommodations and telecommunications. However, ADA does not cover housing, air travel, and insurance coverage; these areas are covered by other laws, or are not covered at all for



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individuals with disabilities. Hopefully we can change this in the future. After 25 years, the ADA has helped make many changes in our environment, like curb cuts, power doors, accessible bathrooms, accessible movies and concerts, and all types of local services such as city hall, libraries, and even nature trails. Our communities are more open and inclusive. And for the most part individuals with disabilities can live in the community of their choice. So what does the future hold for the ADA?

Two areas that the ADA has not improved greatly are employment and attitudes about disability. Employment and attitudes about disability have not improved significantly in spite of the ADA. Our community still struggles with employment and the services to support employment. Our benefit systems promote unemployment and penalize individuals with disabilities who try to work with a disability. Attitudes about disability run throughout our culture and society. The biggest barriers that individuals with disabilities face are attitudes about us, including attitudes from employers about our ability to work, to attitudes in health care that we are sick and need to be fixed. Our government sees us as takers, not givers. We are treated as children or second class citizens by the human services systems that were created to provide the services we need.

So let's celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ADA this year and be proud of the gains we have made over the years, but remain focused on the work ahead, which is to change the attitudes of our culture regarding disabilities into a positive, equally inclusive community for all.

Thank you,

Paul Spooner,  
Executive Director

## ADA Boston

We hope that Paul's thoughts on the ADA have inspired *you* to reflect on the past 25 years, and to think about what is left to do, and to figure out how we can continue to move forward. David and I will be at the Boston Celebration on Wednesday, and want to know what you think. We will be

video taping to make our own short film that will be shown at our November 13 Gala Awards evening. *We would love to add your voice!*



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