



Vote!

By The Arc

“Vote as if your life depends on it,” Justin Dart, Jr., the disability rights pioneer often known as the father of the Americans with Disabilities Act, implored us, “Because it does.”

Our core values call us to focus on voting during Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month in this critical election year. The Arc’s core value of community underscores that “people with intellectual and developmental disabilities . . . have *fundamental moral, civil and constitutional rights to be fully included and actively participate in all aspects of society.*” Our core value of self-determination provides, “People with intellectual and developmental disabilities, with appropriate resources and supports, can make decisions about their own lives *and must be heard on issues that affect their well-being.*”

Voting is the most fundamental civil right. By exercising the right to vote, people have a say in how our democracy moves forward. As we advocate together for the full inclusion of people with disabilities in our communities, people with disabilities must have an equal say in how our society operates. Through voting, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) exercise that voice equally with all members of their communities.

By advocating on the issues they care about and supporting candidates who will fight for their agendas, people with I/DD exercise their right to self-determination. The disability community gains power by showing candidates that it will support those who advocate with us.

Unfortunately, some – but not all – states automatically deprive people with disabilities who are under guardianship of the right to vote. In other states, people with I/DD with guardians retain the right to vote unless a court specifically finds the person ineligible to vote. Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE) provides guidance on knowing your right to vote if you have a guardian: <https://www.sabeusa.org/govoter/voting-info/voting-and-guardianship/>. Voting is a core civil right, and people with disabilities should not automatically lose that right if they are under guardianship. We must fight to change these laws.

The implications of guardianship are far reaching. It has long been The Arc’s position that most people with I/DD can manage their own affairs with assistance and guidance from others, and that if guardianship is necessary it should be limited and tailored. Before

considering guardianship, people with I/DD and their families should explore the many less restrictive ways that people with I/DD can receive support to make decisions. The individual and his or her family should understand all of the implications of limiting the person's autonomy and transferring his or her rights to a guardian, including the possibility that the person will be deprived of the right to vote. For more information on informal and formal ways to support people with I/DD to make their own decisions, visit The Arc's Center for Future Planning: <https://futureplanning.thearc.org/pages/learn/where-to-start/supporting-daily-and-major-life-decisions>.

Even if a person has been deprived of the right to vote, he or she can still actively participate during this election season by supporting candidates and advocating on issues. Let's make sure the voices of people with I/DD are heard and that the candidates understand our messages. And, let's fight to change laws that deprive people with I/DD of their civil rights.

The Arc promotes and protects the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and actively supports their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes. The Special Needs Alliance is collaborating with The Arc on providing educational resources, building public awareness and advocating for policies on behalf of people with intellectual/developmental disabilities and their families.

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