

WASHINGTON, DC – (July 26, 2010) Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) submitted the following statement.

Today marks 20 years since the historic Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law. It is one of the most important pieces of civil rights legislation of the last quarter century. Passage of this groundbreaking law came as a result of the efforts of legions of activists. I want to recognize two individuals, in particular, who made ADA possible. The late Justin Dart, a true civil rights leader, was instrumental in the fight to pass the law that made discrimination against people with disabilities illegal. He showed us the path, and we continue to look to his lessons as we chart new ground. His spirit is with us on this anniversary and every day that we fight for justice for all.

I also want to recognize Marca Bristo, who has been an unflagging national leader in the fight for people living with disabilities. I am lucky to call her a friend but Bristo has also been a teacher. She has educated untold numbers of people, including me, by opening our eyes to the barriers standing in the way of people with disabilities. Bristo has been at the helm of Access Living of Metropolitan Chicago for decades. As an organizer in the critical work of disability rights years before the ADA was passed in Congress, she, too, was incredibly influential in creating and shepherding the law to passage.

Since ADA's passage, we have taken many steps to build on its foundation – and we've accomplished many of our goals in recent years. This includes a historic health care bill that will prevent insurance companies from denying coverage, dropping coverage, setting discriminatory annual or lifetime limits on benefits, or charging higher premiums to people with disabilities. We have passed mental health parity legislation. And we are providing more

home- and community-based options for care.

Yet, we cannot sit back and become comfortable with what we have achieved with – and since – passage of the ADA. We know we have much more left to do. Every person must be guaranteed full access to safe housing, good jobs, educational opportunities, quality health care, cutting edge technology, and economic prosperity. Our great country can be made even greater by providing every person with the opportunity to contribute and live comfortably in their community.

We must work to enforce the ADA, not reward those who disobey it. There is simply no excuse for anyone who violates the Americans with Disabilities Act; laws that protect the rights those living with disabilities are no less important and no different from any other legal protection.

We have to make sure that the Community Choice Act is passed and implemented, to further expand the infrastructure so individuals can get convenient, quality care in the settings that everyone prefers: at home and in our own communities.

We must expand opportunities for independence. That is why I am the sponsor of H.R. 1408, the Inclusive Home Design Act, to require that new, single-family homes that get federal assistance meet minimum standards so those with disabilities can come and go freely and seniors can age in place. This is a common sense solution that ensures livability as well as sound economics. Building new homes that are accessible from the start cost several hundred dollars, while retrofitting can cost several thousand dollars or more – forcing some people to move into a nursing home.

We must also expand the realms of access for people living with disabilities – especially to new technologies that did not exist at ADA's inception. Therefore, I am also a sponsor of H.R. 4533, the Technology Bill of Rights for the Blind Act, to require that consumer products like home appliances and office equipment are manufactured so that they are fully accessible to blind consumers.

On this 20th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, I whole-heartedly thank the countless individuals who worked tirelessly to lay the groundwork for ADA in the decades that preceded its passage. Without their passion and activism, we would not be celebrating today. I also thank those who continue the fight, and I look forward to helping to build upon the enormous successes of the ADA – in this Congress and in those to come.