



Statement for the Liberty, Independence, Freedom and Equity Virtual Rally

It is an honor to participate in your Liberty, Independence, Freedom and Equity Virtual Rally. I want to thank the National Council on Independent Living for the invitation to submit this statement and be part of your event.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been difficult for all Americans, but it has been even more trying for Americans with disabilities. They face greater challenges to avoid the isolation and other pandemic-related issues that affect their freedom and mental health. But with every vaccination, we get closer to a return to normal. So, it is a good time to have events like this one and discuss the solutions necessary to help community members lead more independent lives.

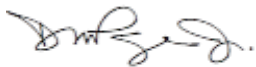
It is a cause that I support every day in Congress. For example, I know Social Security is critical to the health and well-being of Americans with disabilities. That is why I co-sponsored the Social Security Income Restoration Act. It would adjust the qualifications for program eligibility and make it easier to apply for benefits. That way, millions of Americans can finally get the financial support they need to thrive.

In addition, I am a strong supporter of the provisions in the American Rescue Plan to help disabled Americans. The most important one is the almost \$13 billion to support Home and Community-Based Services. This funding increases access to personal care aides and other professionals needed in the community and provides additional community support services for them.

Another provision provides \$3 billion for services related to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This funding helps 7.5 million schoolchildren get the resources they need to get their education. In addition, it includes \$4 billion to increase access to mental health care for community members. The stress of life during COVID-19 has led to increased depression and substance abuse for too many disabled Americans. This funding will help them find the help and treatments they need to recover from those issues.

But these provisions would not have happened without the work of the National Council on Independent Living. It has been advocating to improve the freedom and independence of Americans with disabilities for 40 years. I have enjoyed my relationship with the Council to increase awareness of these issues in Congress in the past. I look forward to working with it to make life easier for our disabled community now and into the future.

Thank you,



Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress