

Strengthening Bipartisan Support for Disability Rights

Working Across the Aisle

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Disability Rights Should Not Be Partisan

- Disability affects every family, community, and political party.
- Our greatest victories came through bipartisan leadership.
- Civil rights should never depend on who controls Congress.
- Today's advocacy requires relationships, not political warfare.

Protect disability rights by bringing people together.



A Bipartisan Legacy

Major milestones made possible through bipartisan leadership:

- Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- Section 504
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Olmstead Decision
- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
- Americans Cares Act
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Republicans, Democrats, Independents, businesses, families, and disabled advocates all helped shape disability rights.



Facing a Harder Political Environment

- Disability policy has faced growing political polarization in recent years.
- It has become harder for organizations to maintain relationships across both parties.
- Advocacy has become transactional instead of relational.

If we stop talking to one side, we stop influencing it.



Friendship Is Not Endorsement

- Meet with policymakers from every party.
- Respect people without agreeing on every issue.
- Educate instead of argue.
- Find common ground while standing firm on disability rights.

The best advocates build bridges, not burn them.



Why This Matters Now

Disability rights are under pressure.

Current issues include:

- Medicaid
- HCBS
- Independent Living
- Employment
- Housing
- Transportation
- Education
- Civil Rights Enforcement

We need champions on both sides of the aisle.



Disability Rights Are Like a House

The foundation includes:

- ADA
- Section 504
- Medicaid
- HCBS
- IDEA
- Olmstead
- Independent Living Programs
- National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR)

When one piece weakens, the entire structure becomes more vulnerable.



Advocacy vs. Lobbying

Advocacy

- Education
- Storytelling
- Awareness
- Lived experience

Lobbying

- Meeting policymakers
- Requesting policy action
- Tracking legislation
- Building relationships

Both are essential.



Relationships Win

- Show up consistently.
- Become a trusted resource.
- Listen before you speak.
- Learn legislative priorities.
- Stay engaged, even when you disagree.



Communicating Across the Aisle

Frame disability issues around shared values.

- Independence
- Family
- Employment
- Fiscal responsibility
- Civil rights
- Community participation

Effective advocacy changes the conversation – not your values.



Stories Change Policy

Facts inform.

Stories persuade.

Tell stories that include:

- The challenge
- Human impact
- Policy barrier
- Solution
- Outcome
- Fiscal impact



Avoid These Common Mistakes

- Letting disability rights become a partisan wedge issue.
- Burning bridges
- Showing up only during a crisis
- Failing to follow up
- Avoiding one political party



The American Disability & Aging Alliance (ADAA)

A disability-led coalition advancing national advocacy through collaboration.

Our priorities:

- Protect rights, Medicaid & HCBS
- Advance Independent Living
- Protect IL & disability research funding
- Build bipartisan relationships
- Ensure disability-led voices are at every decision-making table

Together, we are stronger than any one organization.



What ADAA Has Accomplished

In less than one year:

- Relationships with approximately 26 Members of Congress
- Meetings with Congress, CMS, and HHS
- Three national advocacy fly-ins
- Advanced federal appropriations priorities
- Coordinated national messaging
- Elevated disability and aging priorities nationally

Collective advocacy gets results.



Partnering with McGuireWoods Consulting

A bipartisan government relations firm helping ADAA:

- Build congressional relationships
- Monitor legislation
- Develop advocacy strategy
- Connect grassroots advocates with policymakers
- Provide federal policy intelligence
- Also a law firm with a large team of experts

Grassroots advocates tell the story. McGuireWoods helps those stories reach decision-makers.

Meet Scott Binkley



Join the Effort

Whether you're a CIL, disability organization, aging organization, or community partner, there's a place for you.

You Can:

- Support ADAA by joining and contributing funds
- Be at the table/Monthly updates
- Receive monthly federal policy updates
- Participate in congressional and administration meetings
- Build bipartisan relationships
- Share your expertise
- Help shape national disability policy

Together, we can restore bipartisan disability advocacy.



Questions?



Contact Information

ADAA (American Disability and Aging Alliance)

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