

## My New Years' Resolution

By: Aaron Carter Bates

With the year 2015 right around the corner, I thought it would be nice to address the journey that was 2014 and what's ahead. 2014 was a big year for moving the needle on issues critical to the disability rights movement. In addition to various disability-specific laws passed and/or reauthorized, and States begin to pursue state-specific resolution(s) to the issues confronting our community. Most importantly, however, the United States Congress finally passed, and the President signed into law, the ABLE Act. The ABLE Act is a strong attempt to at least begin to address the financial disincentives to having a disability and being independent and/or gainfully employed.

Eleanor Roosevelt once said that, “much attention is paid to the aggressive sins, such as violence and cruelty and greed with all their tragic effects, that too little attention is paid to the passive sins, such as apathy and laziness, which in the long run can have a more devastating effect.” Over the years, benign neglect or indifference have served as one of the root causes of stunted progress and stifling equal opportunities for the disability community. As part of this failure to make more progress, our community largely sat by as the system became more rigged against the disabled. In essence, the benefit and supports system for the disabled (federally and locally) is now designed to do nothing more than force the disabled into becoming wards or dependents of the state. Accordingly, the community must take responsibility for our failure to identify common goals amongst different disability sub-groups and work to galvanize the support needed to press those important issues through.

Just as a spectator fails to impact the outcome of a sporting event, the passing of legislation, or a win in the court room, nor does a passive disabled community effectuate real change. So, for 2015, I have two resolutions that I'm hoping others will sign on to. First, to the extent you're not engaged, I challenge everyone to research, identify, and allocate your time and/or money to credible non-profits that are on the front lines of pursuing equal opportunities and access for the entire disabled community.

Second? Make your voices heard. I'm a believer that the larger our voice and collaboration, the harder it is for stoic politicians and bureaucrats to ignore. The fact that the disabled community is often NOT represented by the disabled would be funny if not so sad.

Here's to a successful 2015.