



Out Front

Michael G. Negrete, Chapter President

July 26, 2020 marks the 30th Anniversary of President George H.W. Bush signing into law the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA) were created to ensure a more inclusive America by providing civil rights protections to individuals with disabilities similar to those provided to individuals on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age, and religion. The ADA and ADAAA also assure equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities for access to businesses, employment, transportation, state and local government programs and services, and electronic technologies.

This landmark legislation provided a new freedom for people with disabilities. The freedom to work, the freedom to participate in all aspects of our society, and simply the freedom to achieve one's own personal independence! Even though 30 years might seem like a long time to have been in place, there's still so much more work to be done. Even with the support of the ADA, there are daily battles we fight on your behalf to maintain these rights, your freedom and your independence. As I've said before, I can't imagine navigating and living in a society where my access as a person didn't exist. Having to endure the indignant and discriminatory treatment as a second-class citizen had to be nearly unbearable. We should be thankful to those who laid the road to success for us all those years ago. It's because of their sufferings and persistent efforts, that has made our journeys today that much easier.

Closer to home, we are still raising our voice to address the discriminatory language and treatment of those with underlying disabilities in Massachusetts' Critical Standards of Care policies. Earlier this month, I wrote a letter on behalf of the Chapter membership directly to Marylou Sudders, Massachusetts' Secretary Health and Human Services, which included several testimonial statements written by Chapter members. It is vitally important to remind policymakers that the decisions they make affect real people, and so it's important that they hear directly from those people - YOU. Nothing is more powerful and humanizing than hearing directly from those that will be directly affected. The good news is, through these efforts, we've been able to make a positive impact by having some of the policies revised in favor of our positions on them. If you're interested in a copy of the letter and the testimonials, as well as learning about our government relations efforts, please get in touch with our Government Relations Director Kristen McCone Gordon. Kristen would be more than glad to hear from you, both to share what she has working on AND listen to what you have to say.

At the end of June we held our Annual Membership meeting via teleconference. Although we mailed out over 800 postcards directly to members throughout New England, there unfortunately was only a very small turn out. A key decision made at this meeting was to postpone the Chapter elections until June 2021. This was primarily because of State and local COVID restrictions preventing the Election Committee from meeting, and also in an effort to maintain the current balance and forward momentum of the Chapter as we navigate through these unprecedented times. The hope is by next June the conditions will exist which will allow us to properly execute the election policies set forth by PVA. For updates on this and our overall Office Re-opening plans, please keep your eye here on the newsletter, as well as, the Chapter website.

We have had several members respond to the Chapter's COVID Member Relief Grant. The Board and I are extremely proud of the fact that the Chapter is in the financial position to be able to help our members in their time of need. If you, or another member you know, is in need of financial assistance to meet your essential living needs with food insecurity, medical supplies, utilities, or transportation needs, for example, please contact Executive Director Mark Murphy. There is also detailed grant information on the Chapter website at www.newenglandpva.org. We are here to help our brothers and sisters in arms however we can.

Finally, let me leave you with a quote from author and speaker Leo Buscaglia - "Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around." As you journey through your day, week, life, know that the smallest of gestures may have an unknown impact on someone along the way.

Michael G. Negrete
Chapter President/PVA National Director
and Paralyzed Veteran