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## Landmark Law Advances the Rights of D.C. Residents with Disabilities

**Washington, D.C.** – It's official! The District of Columbia now has a law on the books that will recognize and promote the decision-making rights of its residents who live with disabilities.

Thanks to the support of a [coalition](#) of local disability rights advocates and [D.C. governmental partners](#), the [Disability Services Reform Amendment Act of 2018](#) became official law on May 5, 2018. This important law will move the District forward in respecting the rights and dignity of all its residents in key ways by:

- **Ending Mandatory Civil Commitment** -- The law stops requiring people with at least a moderate level of intellectual disability to go to court and be civilly committed to receive certain residential services. People who are already civilly committed can choose to remain so and, if they cannot make that decision themselves, then family members, close friends, or someone appointed by the court can make that decision for them. "Civil commitment is left over from the days of Forest Haven, when the only services available for D.C. residents with intellectual and developmental disabilities were through that large institution," says Ricardo Thornton, Co-President of [Project ACTION!](#). "My wife and I used to live there, and we were glad when it closed over 25 years ago. It is time for the District to move forward and recognize that people like us do and should live freely in the community now."
- **Formally Recognizing Supported Decision-Making** – The law makes the District of Columbia the fourth jurisdiction in the United States to statutorily recognize Supported Decision-Making Agreements. As described by the [National Resource Center for Supported Decision-Making](#), this decision-making tool is an alternative to guardianship where an adult with a disability makes his or her own decisions by using people he or she trusts to help understand the issues and choices faced. "Years of research have shown that people with disabilities who have more control over their lives live longer, have better jobs, are more integrated in their communities, and are better able to resist abuse," says Tina M. Campanella, Chief Executive Officer of [Quality Trust for Individuals with Disabilities](#). "Supported Decision-Making is a way people with disabilities and older adults can shape their own futures with the support they need and want."
- **Requiring DDS to Create a Formal Complaint Process** – The law paves the way for more people receiving services and supports from the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) to have any problems addressed by requiring the D.C. Department on Disabilities Services (DDS) to develop a formal complaint process, with appeal rights to the D.C. Office of Administrative Hearings. "DDS's own quality assurance program is not sufficient," says [Robert D. Dinerstein](#), Professor of Law and Director of the Disability Rights Law Clinic at American University Washington College of Law. "A grievance system that can be initiated by the person, with or without the assistance of a supporter, provides an extra level of protection for all recipients of DDA services. It is a reform for which the District's disability rights community has been advocating for years."

**Disability Rights are Civil Rights!** Please join us in welcoming these new reforms that will impact thousands of District residents with disabilities.

**Contacts:** Morgan K. Whitlatch, [mwhitlatch@dcqualitytrust.org](mailto:mwhitlatch@dcqualitytrust.org), 202-459-4004  
Sandy Bernstein, [sbernstein@uls-dc.org](mailto:sbernstein@uls-dc.org), 202-547-0198  
Heidi Case, DC Metro ADAPT, [hacase60@yahoo.com](mailto:hacase60@yahoo.com), 202-531-9808  
Joan Christopher, [joan.christopher@georgetown.edu](mailto:joan.christopher@georgetown.edu), 202-687-7712  
Robert D. Dinerstein, [rdiners@wcl.american.edu](mailto:rdiners@wcl.american.edu), 202-274-4141  
Molly L. Whalen, [mwhalen@dcase.org](mailto:mwhalen@dcase.org), 202-615-3070  
Alison Whyte, [alison.whyte@dc.gov](mailto:alison.whyte@dc.gov) 202-727-8005