



House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Members of the House of Representatives

FROM: Representative Brendan Boyle

DATE: March 16, 2011

SUBJECT: Cosponsorship Memo: Encouraging the use of “intellectual disability” in place of the term “mental retardation”

In the near future, I will be introducing a resolution encouraging all Pennsylvanians to use the term “intellectual disability”, instead of “mental retardation”, in public discourse as well as official documents.

Intellectual disability is one of the most common of disabilities, affecting nearly one out of every ten families. Most individuals with intellectual disabilities live in a community setting and lead full and rewarding lives. Thousands hold full time jobs and are excellent role models for other employees as a result of their work ethic and dedication.

While in the past, professionals such as physicians employed the term “mentally retarded” to describe individuals with intellectual disabilities, that term has devolved into common slang, often used in a negative or perjorative sense.

Most recently, human services professionals and organizations began advocating for replacement of the currently used term, “mental retardation”, with “intellectual disability”. Many of these organizations changed their titles and any reference to the term in their operations. In October of last year, a federal law was passed which would require references in federal statutes to be changed accordingly. Today, the federal government and many states now use intellectual disability instead of mental retardation as a matter of policy.

As a result of the stigma many associate with the use of the term mental retardation, and the acceptance of intellectual disability as the preferred descriptor, my resolution encourages Pennsylvanians to use the term intellectual disability in place of mental retardation in public discourse.

If you would like to add your name as a co-sponsor to this legislation, please contact Kristen Womelsdorf at 705-1922 or KWomelsd@pahouse.net.