

# The Arc Wisconsin: Applauds new law removing the 'r word' from state rules

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The Arc Wisconsin applauds the bi-partisan legislators and Governor Tony Evers who came together today to enact a law that means a great deal people with disabilities across Wisconsin. Senate Bill 19, signed by the Governor Tuesday, finally removes the harmful "R Word" from state administrative rules.

"People with disabilities tell us this word is hurtful and demeaning," says Lisa Pugh, Executive Director of The Arc Wisconsin. "Changing how we talk about people with disabilities is a critical step in promoting and protecting their basic civil and human rights."

Fifteen-year-old Abbey Kaiser of Madison, a member of The Arc Dane County who happens to have Down syndrome says, "People with disabilities want opportunities. To have real jobs, to vote, to be included, and to be respected. I want people to know that my future is looking up, not down."

By making this change to administrative rules Wisconsin is now in line with the medical community, federal law and the leading academic institutions that have developed policy for people with intellectual disabilities since the early 1900s. Perhaps the biggest sign that the R-word was outdated was when a group of academics from the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disability - AAIDD, (formerly AAMR) agreed to change their name back in 2007. Shortly thereafter, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) changed its definition and diagnostic criteria for what was previously referred to as MR.

In 2010, both houses of Congress unanimously passed, and the President signed Rosa's Law, a bill that removes the "R" word from all federal health, education and labor policy and replaces it with "intellectual disability." Nick, Rosa's eleven-year-old brother said during the hearings, "What you call my sister is how you will treat her.... It invites taunting, stigma and bullying."

"The Arc has been a strong advocate for the removal of the R word from federal and state law and policy across the country," says Pugh. "Words are powerful. While the r-word may not have the same emotion and meaning behind it to everyone, it's a hurtful, disrespectful, and unacceptable word to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. And that's enough to remove it from our state policy."

The Arc Wisconsin advocates for and serves people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD), including Down syndrome, autism, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, cerebral palsy and other diagnoses. The Arc Wisconsin has 15 local chapters and is connected to a network of more than 650 chapters across the country promoting and protecting the human rights of people with I/DD and actively supporting their full inclusion and participation in the community throughout their lifetimes and without regard to diagnosis.