

# U.S. Rep. Pocan, colleagues: Introduce Words Matter Act

Posted on Friday, Apr 28, 2023

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** - Today, **U.S. Representatives Mark Pocan (WI-02), Pete Sessions (TX-17), Eleanor Holmes Norton (DC), and Cathy McMorris Rogers (WA-05)** reintroduced the ***Words Matter Act***, bipartisan legislation that updates the U.S. Code by removing the more than two dozen instances of “mentally retarded” from federal law, replacing the outdated language with terminology befitting both the 21st Century and human dignity.

“This bill just makes sense,” **Congressman Pocan said.** “Federal law should reflect the time in which we live and not include harmful words or slurs. The Words Matter Act will modernize our laws, and remove offensive language from the U.S. Code. I thank my colleagues from both sides of the aisle for joining this effort to update our laws in a manner that is respectful of every American. I look forward to this bill’s immediate passage so we can retire this language once and for all.”

“I am the proud father of a Down syndrome young adult and Eagle Scout,” **Congressman Sessions said.** Those who know my son regard him as an able, loving, and accomplished young man, whose abilities far outnumber his disabilities. I am confident that the ‘Words Matter Act’ will bring us one step closer to ushering our U.S. Code into the present. While this change is long past due, I am pleased to be a lead co-sponsor of this bi-partisan legislation which amends dated language to ‘intellectual disability’ for federal laws. Those with Down syndrome are a blessing from God and deserve to be respected as such.”

“My oldest son Cole has Down syndrome. From the day he was born, I watched as others tried to limit his potential. But Cole has refused to let his extra 21st chromosome define him, defying his doubters at every turn,” **said Congresswoman Rodgers.** “In America, we are not defined by the condition of

our birth, and it's well-past time the text of our nation's laws reflect that. The use of outdated and derogatory language in previously written law fails to treat individuals with disabilities with the dignity and respect they deserve. I'm confident the Words Matter Act will prove that our country knows better by bringing the laws of our land into the 21st century and setting a new standard for the way we speak about others in America."

"Words indisputably matter, and I'm proud to be a lead cosponsor of Rep. Pocan's bill," **Congresswoman Norton said.** "My own daughter, Katherine, has Down syndrome. I'm appalled at the thought of someone using the word 'retarded' toward her, and it is inexcusable that the word is still part of the U.S. Code. Our country is better than this, as passage of Rep. Pocan's bill will show."

The 111th Congress struck "mental retardation" from federal law via "Rosa's Law" (P.L. 111-256), which passed the House by voice vote and the Senate by unanimous consent. Unfortunately, it did not strike the equally offensive term "mentally retarded" which this bill will do, bringing federal law into the 21st Century.

**Words Matter Act Cosponsors Include (33):** Blumenauer, Budzinski, Castor, DeSaulnier, Doggett, Duncan, Evans, Fitzpatrick, C. Garcia, Grijalva, Houchin, Kaptur, Keating, Langworthy, Letlow, McCollum, McGarvey, McMorris Rodgers, Molinaro, Moskowitz, K. Mullin, Nickel, Norton, Payne, Jr., Phillips, Tokuda, Tonko, Schakowsky, Sessions, Sherrill, C. Smith, Watson Coleman, Wild

**Organizations Endorsing the Words Matter Act Include:** Special Olympics, Global Down Syndrome Foundation, National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (NACDD), Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD), National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS)