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2000

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SOCIAL SECURITY

Office of the Deputy Commissioner

March 10, 2000

Dear Colleague:

This is the year of our celebration of the tenth anniversary of the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act! As part of the commemoration of the passage of this historic civil rights law, the Social Security Administration will act as the lead sponsor of Conference 2000, an International Disability Law and Policy Conference scheduled for late September 2000 in Washington, DC. The Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF) will serve as SSA's coordinator in the overall planning and implementation of the event. DREDF is working with an international panel of legal and policy experts to develop a rich conference agenda, as well as topics for policy research papers.

The purpose of this letter is to invite your agency to act as a Federal co-sponsor of this important international conference. As you can see from the attached prospectus, the agenda is an ambitious one. We believe it will make a significant contribution to international dialogue and to the evolution of human and civil rights for people with disabilities around the world. The Social Security Administration has committed significant funding to planning and developing this event. We are now in the process of inviting Federal co-sponsors in an effort to generate a level of funding that will support this substantive and ambitious agenda and enable significant participation from countries around the world. There is substantial interest in the community for this type of conference and we have learned that private funding is being sought to support the event as well. We believe the content of this conference is relevant to the policy, priorities and goals of many Federal agencies. We are inviting you to support the conference in any way appropriate, given your agency's funding authority. An interagency agreement to transfer funds or supply a variety of in-kind support resources might be appropriate.

Please take a minute to review the enclosed prospectus. If you have any questions or if you would like to discuss your support for this effort, please contact Marie Strahan of my staff at 410-965-5774 or marie.p.strahan@ssa.gov. Our deadline for confirmation of co-sponsorship is March 24, 2000. We hope you will join us in this exciting endeavor.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan M. Daniels". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Susan M. Daniels, Ph.D.
Deputy Commissioner
for Disability & Income Security Programs

Enclosure

PROSPECTUS

Conference 2000: An International Disability Law And Policy Conference To Commemorate The Tenth Anniversary Of The ADA

The concept of disability discrimination is a relatively new one worldwide. Countries are at various stages of developing strategies to advance or implement laws and policies to protect people with disabilities from discrimination and exclusion. While the ADA has broad international appeal and is sometimes used as a model, a decade of implementation in the United States has revealed important lessons and some critical weaknesses which must be acknowledged and shared. Other nations have adopted laws which are yielding important information and which can also inform future strategies. Where disability leaders — attorneys, policy advocates and others—are striving to shift to an individual and civil rights-based approach grounded in law, collaboration with peers and the opportunity to discuss complex and challenging conceptual issues can be invaluable, even essential, to avoid the mistakes of others.

Conference: Overarching Themes

- How disability is defined;
- How civil rights policies integrate (or fail to integrate) into social safety net programs and national health policy;
- Principles of equal citizenship;
- Integration and inclusion; and
- Full community participation in education, employment, the operation of government and private programs and activities, businesses, and community life.

Conference Goals

- To establish an international working group of attorneys, policy and legislative experts who are using law as a prime vehicle for policy change or social reform;
- To develop a common understanding of basic conceptual and legal principles that serve as the foundation for disability rights law and policy;
- To identify specific strategies and tactics that will help advance legal reforms in ways that comport with the governance structure of a particular country;
- To evaluate the need for ongoing communication and education; and
- To develop organizing strategies and to establish closer ties between community and law reform advocates, and attorney/practitioners.

Conference Structure and Participants

The three-day conference will allow ample opportunity for substantive presentations by subject matter experts as well as for formal and informal discussion and collaboration among participants and presenters. Total conference participants will number no more than 130, comprised of 60 to 75 invited participants from 20 to 30 countries, 15 additional experts from the United States, some subject matter experts who will serve as presenters, staff, and selected observers from funding agencies. Potential participants will be invited according to certain criteria:

- Substantial experience working for legal and civil rights reforms on behalf of people with disabilities either as an attorney, a policy analyst or the equivalent;
- Strong familiarity with the legal and governance structure of the home country as well as its disability rights laws, other social programs and policies, including its use of international human rights conventions; and
- The ability to identify the individual and civil rights issues and problems that are most important in the home country and the type of information and collaboration that would be useful.

Other selection factors will include:

- Identifying individuals with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities as potential attendees;
- Identifying and selecting two or three people from the same country who represent different constituencies and communities and who could benefit from attending as a team;
- Selecting most participants from countries with a functioning rule of law that encourages citizen participation, and have demonstrated some movement toward disability rights-oriented public policy or social and human service policies that promote disability rights.

Scholarships

At least sixty percent of the participants, including subject matter experts who will serve as authors and presenters, will require some financial assistance.

Commissioned Papers

Ten papers commissioned from leading subject matter experts internationally will establish a basic conference framework. Four pre-conference papers will cover:

- An overview of the legal and governance structure of selected countries within key regions, an overview of selected countries' disability laws and policies, and the extent of their implementation or enforcement;
- A compilation and analysis of the various definitions of disability used in individual, civil and human rights, and other relevant laws internationally;
- A summary of the ways human rights conventions may be used to secure rights for individuals with disabilities; and
- A summary compilation of disability rights laws and other relevant laws internationally.

Conference Follow-up

A web site will be established to promote progressive disability law and policy, with an emphasis on civil and individual rights internationally. It will provide materials which can be viewed and downloaded, international legal links and resources, a mailing list option and the conference proceedings. The papers prepared for the conference will be edited and published.

Conclusion

Conference 2000 affords the first opportunity for the world's leading disability rights experts, legal scholars and policy scholars to come together to discuss legal theories and issues, and to develop a shared world view from which future social reforms can be launched. Even if change takes decades to achieve in some places, a process will have begun that cannot be reversed.

LEAD AGENCY – SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION
Contact: M. Strahan (410) 965-5774 marie.p.strahan@ssa.gov

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER
FOR DISABILITY AND INCOME SECURITY PROGRAMS
TELEPHONE NUMBER (410) 965-0100
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