



February 5, 2013

The Honorable Pete Higgins, Chair  
House Health and Social Services Committee  
Alaska State House of Representatives  
State Capitol, Room 106  
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: HB 88: Intellectual and Developmental Disability

Dear Chair Higgins:

The Disability Law Center of Alaska provides legal advocacy services to Alaskans with disabilities in a variety of practice areas, including special education, Medicaid benefits, and employment. Based on our nearly 36 years of experience, we enthusiastically support the goal of HB 88, which is to remove from Alaska statutes the phrase "mental retardation" and its variants, and replace it with "intellectual and developmental disabilities."

In her Sponsor Statement, Representative Millett correctly notes that what began as a clinical term has morphed into a "derogatory term that is sometimes used to degrade and insult people with intellectual disabilities." The brother of the young woman behind Rosa's Law, while testifying before the Maryland General Assembly, stated:

*What you call my sister is how you will treat her. If you believe she's 'retarded,' it invites taunting, stigma. It invites bullying, and it also invites the slammed doors of being treated with respect and dignity.*

Words matter. Alaskans with intellectual and developmental disabilities deserve to be treated with respect and dignity and we look to the House Health and Social Services Committee to lead the way toward this positive change. HB 88 is a significant step in the direction of including all individuals in the community we call Alaska.

Sincerely,

DISABILITY LAW CENTER OF ALASKA

David C. Fleurant  
Executive Director

MEMBER OF THE  
NATIONAL  
DISABILITY  
RIGHTS  
NETWORK