

STATEMENT OF MARY LOU MECCARIELLO
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
THE Arc OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

JOINT PUBLIC HEARING BY THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE AND
COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES REGARDING

PR 17-428, "SENSE OF THE COUNCIL REGARDING RIGHTS AND SERVICES
FOR RESIDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL
DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES RESOLUTION OF 2007"

October 30, 2007

Good morning Council Chairman Gray, Councilmember Wells and other members of the Council of the District of Columbia. I am Mary Lou Meccariello, Executive Director of The Arc of the District of Columbia (The Arc of DC) and am very pleased to come before you today in support of PR 17-428 "Sense of the Council Regarding Rights and Services for Residents with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and their Families Resolution of 2007."

In 1978, The Arc of DC along with other community groups, families and leaders crafted model legislation D.C. Law 2-137, the *Mentally Retarded Citizens Constitutional Rights and Dignity Act of 1978*, to ensure that individuals leaving Forest Haven would enjoy a better quality of life in the community and end the institutional conditions they had known. Today, that law needs to be modernized to reflect even a better future for persons with developmental disabilities in this city. As we knew back then and know today, change brings hope, new purpose, better choices and a new vision that will guide our principles and values. It is time for change.

As Chair of the Legislative Committee of the Management Advisory Council of the Department on Disability Services (MAC DDS), I am very excited about partnering with Council staff, key advocates, DDS staff and the Evans plaintiffs to carve out new legislation for the future. We all share a universal vision that new laws must be written that will ensure new choices, new services, a better quality of life and best practices for individuals in this city with developmental disabilities. The language and intent of this resolution is a result of this vision. Through a process of conducting community meetings and focus groups with youth, adults, families, direct support professionals, providers and advocates, we have been able to identify key issues that should be part of new legislation. Subcommittees are being established to help us design legislation that will be shared with the community for review and comment prior to introduction before the Council. In addition, we are looking at other state models and soliciting comments from an expert panel in order to ensure that the legislation is comprehensive, state of the art and appropriate for our community. I have attached a brief summary page to this testimony reflecting these activities.

This resolution addresses critical values and services that will provide a strong foundation for future legislation. Three areas that I view as overarching pieces are family supports, a lifespan approach to service delivery and the expansion of who we serve through the broader definition of developmental disabilities. With the recent creation of the Department on Disability Services, a central point of entry for individuals and their

families will allow for greater continuity of services and cross cooperation and communication with other departments under the Mayor.

This past year has marked significant change for persons with developmental disabilities in the District with the establishment of two new cabinet level departments on disability; the exceptional leadership of our Mayor and Chair of the DC City Council in elevating disability as a priority in our government and community; the fifteen year celebration of the closing of Forest Haven and the production of the video “Beyond Forest Haven” defining what the future could and should be for individuals with disabilities; and the newly defined Waiver services to guide service delivery. It is now time to reorganize and modernize District laws governing the services and supports for persons with developmental disabilities to facilitate the change necessary to empower individuals to guide their future. We look forward to working with the Council on this legislation in 2007/2008.

Thank you for this opportunity to be here today to comment on and support this resolution.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” Margaret Mead

