

One Voice
News conference
April 30, 2007

Thousands of our fellow Pennsylvanians are living with autism or intellectual disabilities. Thousands.

Their friends and family members have worked hard for many years to ensure that they can live full, independent, meaningful lives.

In recent years, some of the most effective advocates have been the people who themselves are living with these disabilities.

Who better than them to tell us, in their own words, about the challenges they face and the dreams they share.

The creation of the One Voice coalition is a clear signal that the autism and intellectual-disability communities are UNITED in their efforts to advance the well-being of our fellow Pennsylvanians.

The creation of Once Voice is an important and necessary step to making sure that our friends and family members with disabilities can live

independently and with dignity, and can maximize their potential.

I think this is a historic day, because of the energy and dedication that's coming together here.

One Voice recognizes that labels often tend to divide people who share common needs, goals and rights.

A label for a disability is not nearly as important as the person who has that disability.

By combining our expertise, our resources, and our energy, the communities that serve people living with autism and intellectual disabilities are going to become much more powerful.

This is a great day in Pennsylvania, and I'm so happy that you've asked me to share it with you.

Thank you.

[Introductions]

I want to recognize the presence of Karen Walsh, deputy chief of staff for Senator Bob Casey. Senator Casey has made autism a priority of his and is working closely with us.

We're also joined by Shirley Walker, the president and CEO of PAR – the Pennsylvania Association of Resources for Autism and Intellectual Disabilities, a group that really pioneered the kind of holistic approach we are taking today.

[Introduction of Speakers]

David Fine, parent of a child living with autism. David is the face of parents across Pennsylvania, and he's here today to tell us more about the One Voice coalition.

Steve Suroviec, executive director of The Arc of Pennsylvania, is here to discuss advocacy from the intellectual disability perspective. The Arc is over 55 years old and has traditionally been an advocate for people with mental retardation. The Arc has 36 chapters and more than nine thousand members in Pennsylvania.

Debbie Robinson is a tireless self-advocate. For more than a decade, she's been executive director of "Speaking for Ourselves" and she even met with President Bill Clinton to discuss the needs of people with disabilities.

Tim McCullough, another self-advocate, is an old friend of mine. With his heartfelt way of speaking, he helped us win a very important budget battle years ago and I'm glad that he returned to the Capitol today to continue educating all of us about autism.

Senator Jane Orie, my partner in this effort, is leading the charge in the Senate. Just as it's important for advocates outside the Capitol to speak with one voice, it's important for the advocates here to do. Jane and I are proud to partners speaking with one voice.