

Disability Activism:

National Focus

"The history of the ADA did not begin on July 26, 1990 at the signing ceremony at the White House. It did not begin in 1988 when the first ADA was introduced in Congress. The ADA story began a long time ago in cities and towns throughout the United States when people with disabilities began to challenge societal barriers that excluded them from their communities, and when parents of children with disabilities began to fight against the exclusion and segregation of their children."

*Arlene Mayerson,
Disability Rights, Education
and Defense Fund*

In 1950, parent groups throughout the country met in Minneapolis to organize The Arc (originally the National Association of Parents and Friends of Retarded Children). By 1960, it had tens of thousands of members, most of whom were parents. They were dedicated to finding alternative forms of care and education for their children.

On March 13, 1990, over 1,000 people marched from the White House to the U.S. Capitol to demand that Congress pass the Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA. When they got there, about 60 of the protesters cast aside their wheelchairs and other mobility aids and crawled up the Capitol steps. The "Capitol Crawl," as it became known, was a physical demonstration of how inaccessible architecture impacts people with disabilities. It also highlighted the urgency behind the need to pass the ADA, which President George H.W. Bush signed into law on July 26, 1990.



"Capitol Crawl" protesters, March 13, 1990.



Jennifer Keelan-Chaffins, an 8-year-old girl with cerebral palsy declared "I'll take all night if I have to," as she pulled herself up the steps.

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