

**From:** [Joshua Cooper](#)  
**To:** [HMS Testimony](#)  
**Subject:** Fwd: Testimony SCR 157 / SR 115 URGING THE STATE TO ADOPT THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND THE UNITED STATES SENATE TO RATIFY THE CONVENTION.  
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## I am submitting testimony in favor of SCR 157 / SR 115 URGING THE STATE TO ADOPT THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND THE UNITED STATES SENATE TO RATIFY THE CONVENTION.

The United State of America presents itself as a light of liberty and defender of democracy to the world. Hawai'i has proven over the five decades our leadership in the pursuit of peace and justice. One of the best indicators to measure the well-being is human rights.

There are nine core international human rights treaties that most states ratify with a promise to their people. Born out of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the past six decades have witnessed important initiatives in international law recognizing the inherent rights of all persons on the planet. Since Eleanor Roosevelt's leadership as Chair of the UN Commission on Human Rights, citizens of the world have worked together to achieve a framework to forge freedom for all through the core human rights treaty bodies.

Each of the treaties also provides a space to secure one's rights or at least systematically review the record of each state.

One of the most important international instruments is the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) that was spearheaded by Mexico and adopted by the United Nations in 2008. The spirit of the negotiations was nothing about us without us setting the bar for advancing the rights of persons with disabilities.

On July 30, 2009, President Barack Obama signed the UN CRPD sending it to the U.S. Senate for review. I was fortunate enough to be in New York on that date to see all of our advocates at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations. People had worked for decades in the field of fundamental freedoms for all met to celebrate this important step toward ratification.

Then almost three years later after the signing of the CRPD, the crucial step of a favorable vote in the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee was successfully taken on its ratification. On July 26, 2012, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the American with Disabilities Act, history was made entering the final stage for a full floor vote in the U.S. Senate with bipartisan support.

Many advocates across America recognize the importance of CRPD to ensure equal treatment for the disabled and take action to end discrimination in access to justice, health care, education and employment. The CRPD will provide America a global platform to encourage all 193 states to ensure equality and demand dignity for all.

America has a long tradition of legislation due to the diligence of those disabled demanding their rights. The ADA and its Amendments Act, IDEA, the Rehabilitation Act, Rosa's Law, and the Developmental Disabilities Act are all significant steps. They were all honorable efforts to guarantee human rights in America. We must take one more together with the CRPD.

The U.S. International Council on Disabilities has mobilized forces for these freedoms. Even 21 veteran organizations have signed on including the American Legion and Wounded Warrior Projects.

Around the world, already 117 countries have made ratification a reality including many of our allies such as Australia, South Korea, the United Kingdom, Italy, Canada and Germany. U.S. ratification will reinforce our commitment to international standards and will allow for leadership in implementation of the treaty obligations in articles enshrining the rights of peoples with disabilities. It will also encourage the adoption of innovative technologies created in our country to improve accessibility around the world. An accessible environment for Americans and all people with disabilities around the planet who travel, study and work abroad is possible through the CRPD.

As the Senate session closed on August 2, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid stated, "This Convention is another step

towards ensuring that all people with a disability, in any country, are treated with dignity and given the right to achieve to their full potential...Just like passing the Americans with Disabilities Act ratifying this Convention is simply the right thing to do.”

The CRPD will be a floor for no person to fall below. However, it will also offer a horizon to aim for in the field of human rights and fundamental freedoms to strive for equality and dignity.

Thank you very much for hearing this important issue and continuing to be the spark for social justice across the Pacific igniting the flame for freedom in America.

Joshua Cooper  
Director, Hawai'i Institute for Human Rights