Disability Legislation Timeline Handout

1800s States throughout America began to build large-scale asylums for people with mental health conditions and other disabilities.

1800s-1900s Many people who had disabilities, and who did not live in an institution, joined the circus as a means to earn money. They were known as “freak” shows. It was one of the few means of earning a living available to people who had physical disabilities.

1861-1865 The American Civil War resulted in 30,000 amputations which brought disability issues to a head in American minds.

1907 The Eugenic Sterilization Law was enacted in Indiana to prevent individuals in institutions from having children. Soon after, 24 other states passed this law.

1920 As a result of the large number of WWI veterans returning with disabilities, the first major rehabilitation program for soldiers was started to provide money for job counseling and vocational training.

1935 President Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act, establishing permanent assistance to adults with disabilities.

1964 The Civil Rights Act was passed, ensuring that African Americans and women could not be discriminated against in the workplace. It does not make any provision for people with disabilities.

1965 Title 19, also known as Medicaid, was created to pay medical costs for certain individuals with disabilities and families with low incomes.

1968 The Architectural Barriers Act mandates that all buildings that are federally funded need to be made accessible.

1973 Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act makes it illegal for federal agencies, public universities and other public institutions receiving any federal funds to discriminate on the basis of disability.

1975 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is signed
into law and guarantees a free, appropriate, public education for all children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment.

1980  The Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act (CRIPA) gives the Department of Justice power to sue state or local institutions that violate the rights of people held against their will.

1986  The Air Carrier Access Act prevents discrimination against people with disabilities through not being able to access essential airport features.

1988  The Fair Housing Amendments Act required that a certain number of accessible housing units be created in all new multi-family housing. The act covers both public and private homes and not only those in receipt of federal funding. The Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act is enacted to develop statewide, consumer-responsive information and training programs designed to meet the assistive technology (AT) needs of individuals with disabilities of all ages.

1990  The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is signed into law and is considered the most important disability-related civil rights law. This legislation gives more rights to people with disabilities regarding employment, housing, access to public buildings, equal transportation and telecommunication rights.

1996  The Telecommunications Act required that computers, telephones, closed captioning and many other telecommunication devices and equipment be made accessible.

1999  The Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvements Act (TWWIIA) expanded the availability of Medicare and Medicaid so that certain disabled beneficiaries who return to work will not lose their medical benefits.

2008  The ADA Amendment expanded the definition of “disability” and ensured that more people with disabilities could receive healthcare coverage and not be discriminated against.

2015  The Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) ensured access for all individuals, of every skill level, the opportunity to pursue the skills, training and education they need to obtain employment that will lead to financial stability and economic security for themselves and their families.