

Speech by Robert Morgan
Attorney General of North Carolina
Welcome and Opening Remarks
N. C. Rehabilitation Counseling Association
Training Session
Raleigh, North Carolina
Wednesday, October 27, 1971, 1:30 p.m.

It is a pleasure to participate in the opening of your training session here today. I have enjoyed working with you in serving disabled people through "Rehabilitation Day" and the Eastern Seal program and these common experiences will remain with me as some of the most inspiring, rewarding, and enlightening moments of my life.

The handicapped we saw on "Rehabilitation Day" were some of the happiest and appreciative people I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. It is amazing how insensitive we have been to their needs. They are in a sense "shut-outs", as opposed to "shut-ins", in the political process and for too long have been ignored in the allocation of our State's financial resources and the structuring of laws to assure all citizens of equal opportunity.

So I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for helping remove the "blindness" from the eyes of many public officials including myself, so we may see more clearly the rehabilitation needs of the people you serve so

ably. As my good friend Bill Kiser -- a victim of cerebral palsy himself -- has so ably stated, "The Constitution may not spell out the rights of disabled people to rehabilitation services, but as human beings we feel we have the right to benefit from, and contribute to, the American way of life."

To be able to welcome such a dedicated group of professionals as you to Raleigh is indeed an honor for me. Although I do not consider myself a professional in the field of rehabilitation, I still feel a very keen responsibility to the handicapped of North Carolina and want to do whatever I can for my fellow citizens who have disabilities.

Each disabled person must have access to the skills of specially trained people -- especially vocational rehabilitation personnel. And we must not forget that you are dependent upon the support of an enlightened public if you are to carry on your work. Therefore, we must work together to broaden the vision of all State leaders and the public in general, to the world of opportunities open to handicapped people. We must make available the broad range of vocational rehabilitation services to all

disabled North Carolinians, and, at the same time, work for progressive legislation to insure proper housing, transportation, barrier free buildings, and the enlightened social climate which the disabled person must have in order to function properly in the community.

The efforts of Vocational Rehabilitation and other related rehabilitation programs have long gone unnoticed. Few people are aware of your major role in the vocational rehabilitation of juvenile and adult offenders, drug offenders, the mentally ill, alcoholics, and mentally retarded; your work with some 40 workshops, the deaf, the blind, 51-years of work with the physically disabled, and recently the more severely physically disabled through a system of comprehensive rehabilitation centers you are trying get funded.

Most important, I do not believe the public understands your potential to serve as the professional advocate for the disabled in the community -- even in city hall -- wherever the need arises. So few people are willing to go beyond the "call of duty" in making certain confused, perhaps destitute, disabled persons do not get lost in the maze of our modern, progressive, social-program laden society.

Recently, I heard of a young lady, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor in Winston-Salem, who, upon learning of her client's sentence to hard labor on charges of public drunkenness and disorderly conduct, went to talk to the court and won his release. You see, the young man was severely retarded, and he had pleaded guilty to charges he never understood. His epileptic seizures had been mistaken for disorderly conduct.

Dramatic illustrations such as this one serve to reaffirm my faith in people and the need for advocates like you.

In summary, I see Vocational Rehabilitation personnel as action-oriented, goal-setting, follow-through professionals -- not only desk oriented therapists -- although that role is certainly important. Your mandate and ability to work with the client from bedside, if you please, on through physical and mental restoration, training, to the point of job placement and followup -- providing every reasonable service necessary -- is unique among the helping professions. Your wide range of cooperative programs is indicative of your flexibility in going above and beyond discipline and agency barriers in the best interest of our people.

issues affecting our handicapped citizens. If someone was foolish enough to propose that the State give every handicapped citizen enough income to live on without working, I would oppose it, not only because the State couldn't afford it, but because most handicapped people do not want this kind of assistance. They want, and deserve, far more than a monthly dole. Among the things they seek are the best medical and restorative services available, proper education, and vocational training. In the world of employment they seek to be judged on their ability, not their disability. While laws alone cannot solve the problems of the handicapped, they can improve the social climate in which the handicapped individual must function. Aside from rehabilitation and employment, progressive legislation is essential in such areas as proper housing and transportation for the handicapped. It has been found that the elimination of architectural barriers in all public buildings is essential if the handicapped are to function properly in the community.

The foregoing remarks might seem like just another plea to aid the handicapped, and well it would be if we do not consider how society as a whole benefits from rehabilitating and accepting the handicapped. Statistics show not only do the handicapped return ten dollars in taxes for every dollar spent on their rehabilitation, but may be expected to contribute another one-half billion dollars to the State's economy during their normal working years.

If tomorrow's newspapers would carry screaming headlines of a discovery of gold, oil or some other valuable natural resource in the State of North Carolina, there would be great excitement and there is little doubt but what the needed capital to develop and market such resources would be raised very quickly. I submit to you that if we think of our handicapped citizens as resources rather than problems, this State can and will find the money.

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THE 1971 CHILD ABUSE LAW REVISED THE PREVIOUS LAW WHICH PROVIDED ONLY FOR VOLUNTARY REPORTING BY PHYSICIANS, SOCIAL WORKERS, AND CERTAIN SCHOOL PERSONNEL OF CHILD ABUSE CASES. IT NOW PROVIDES FOR COMPULSORY REPORTING BY ANY PERSON WHO KNOWS OR HAS REASON TO KNOW OF CHILD ABUSE AND COVERS NOT ONLY THE PROFESSIONAL PEOPLE MENTIONED, BUT WOULD ALSO COVER A NEIGHBOR'S OBSERVANCE OF SOMETHING WHICH WOULD LEAD TO A REASONABLE SUSPICION OF CHILD ABUSE.

THE CRIMINAL PROVISIONS WERE STRENGTHENED AND OTHER MEASURES WERE ADDED WHICH, HOPEFULLY, PROVIDE GREATER PROTECTION FOR THE CHILD. IT IS PREDICTED THAT THE NUMBER OF CHILD ABUSE CASES DETECTED AND REPORTED MAY RISE FROM ABOUT 3,000 A YEAR ACROSS THE STATE TO 5,000 OR MORE, AND THIS IS A CONSERVATIVE ESTIMATE.

THESE ARE JUST A FEW THINGS THAT WERE ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH CITIZEN DEMAND AND POLITICS AND THE NAME OF POLITICS TODAY IS PARTICIPATION. AND LET ME REMIND YOU THAT POLITICIANS ARE NOTHING MORE THAN CITIZENS EXERCISING THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CITIZENSHIP. YOU ARE A POLITICIAN AND PROPERLY SO.