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DISABILITY ADVOCATES CELEBRATE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ADA

Providence, R.I. - Congressman Jim Langevin (D-RI), a founder and co-chair of the Bipartisan Disabilities Caucus in the House of Representatives, commemorated the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act today alongside advocates who continue to fight for increased access and inclusion for people with disabilities. The ADA was signed into law on July 26, 1990. It prohibits discrimination based on disability and provides equal opportunities in the areas of employment, transportation, state and local government, public accommodations and telecommunications.

"The Americans with Disabilities Act is one of the most significant civil rights laws of our time. As a legislator, as an American, and as someone who has lived with a disability both before and after the enactment of the ADA, I am so grateful to the champions and leaders who came before me and paved the way for this groundbreaking piece of legislation," said Congressman Langevin. "Over the past 25 years, we have come so far in increasing accessibility and breaking down barriers for people with disabilities. There is still much to be done to ensure that the disability community has greater access to affordable housing, public transportation, education and employment, but as I look around at the advocates assembled with me today, I am confident that the promise of the ADA will be fulfilled."

Today’s event was hosted by the Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities at Rhode Island College, which was founded in 1993 and is dedicated to supporting individuals with disabilities at RIC and beyond, ensuring that they have the resources and support they need to participate fully in their communities.

"The history of the disability movement has been marked by generations of advocates. The work of the Sherlock Center is an extension of that generation of advocates who fought for community access for all people and is a bridge to the next generation who will continue the push for quality lives," said Anthony Antosh, Director of the Sherlock Center.

Langevin and Antosh were joined by disability advocates who have been directly impacted by the ADA and the changes it fostered.
"As a former professional boxer, I could never have imagined having difficulty performing day-to-day tasks. I still encounter countless physical barriers, but thanks to the ADA and the tireless work of disability advocates, new doors are opened and new hurdles conquered every day. Our work is far from finished, and I will continue to fight for equal access and inclusion," said Gary Balletto, a former boxing champion who, in the two years since an accident left him paralyzed, has emerged as a strong voice for the disability community.

Katie Lowe of the Down Syndrome Society of Rhode Island, who also serves as a representative of the Developmental Disabilities Council, simply said, "I love my life and I am happy."

At the press conference, a clip was screened from "Dare to Be Remarkable," a documentary about the life of 24-year-old Alyssa Silva and her battle with spinal muscular atrophy. SMA is the most common genetic cause of infant death, but Silva continues to fight the disease and has accomplished incredible things, including graduating from college and founding Working on Walking, a non-profit organization dedicated to raising awareness and funds for spinal muscular atrophy.

"For the past 25 years, the ADA has worked continuously and tirelessly to break down the barriers that exist in the disability community, and if we continue to work together, I foresee a remarkable future," said Silva.

Langevin, who recently introduced legislation to increase accessibility in public transit and continues to push for policies that support people with disabilities, thanked RIC for hosting the event and said he believes the speakers who participated represent the next generation of disability advocates.

"The ADA was a major step forward in accessibility and in the treatment of people with disabilities. It opened doors to education, employment and technology, expanded inclusion and access in voting, design standards and public transportation," Langevin continued. "As we celebrate this progress, though, it is important to recognize that there is still so much that needs to be done to empower people with disabilities to live independently and to their full potential. Equality for all is a mission we will never stop working toward, and I am so glad to have such strong, passionate, committed partners with me in our shared struggle to fully realize the goals of the Americans with Disabilities Act."