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DEFINING ADVOCACY



"WHEN I SEE SOMETHING AND SAY, 'SOMEONE OUGHT TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT,' I CAN ACTUALLY BE THAT PERSON. I HAVE THE TOOLS AND RESOURCES TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE."

**LAUREN DEBRUICKER (PA)
UNITED SPINAL ADVOCATE**

WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

Acts of public support or recommendation of a particular cause or policy. To advocate (advocare) means, in Latin, to call in as counsel. A modern translation of 'to advocate' is to call for, to speak out, to voice. This makes active advocacy simple, we just need to speak up and make our voices heard.



WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Through advocacy, communities like ours are able to raise awareness, break down barriers and help further the causes we care about most. Effective advocacy shapes the public debate on social issues and ensures that communities have a voice in the policies that impact their lives. Advocacy allows us the power to influence and advance change.



GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY VS. LOBBYING

While direct lobbying is often conducted on behalf of organizations or associations and exercised by registered lobbyists...

Grassroots advocates are members of the community who are personally affected by an issue. Grassroots advocacy is awareness building that relies on people to use their own voice and stories to reach local, state, or federal decision-makers regarding the issues that affect them directly. As a grassroots advocate, each of us has an opportunity to 'plant seeds' of concern and nurture the kind of awareness that helps a movement grow, like grass.

As a grassroots advocate you have the power to:

- Be heard by decision-makers
- Educate policymakers
- Defend and safeguard your rights
- Share your SCI/D story and experiences
- Show support for or against legislation
- Build influential relationships
- Advise and be considered in life-affecting decisions
- Be part of positive change

"Advocacy is as simple as making your voice heard and with multiple voices, I have no doubt that together we CAN make change."

**– Alexandra Bennewith, MPA, Vice President, Government Relations,
United Spinal Association**

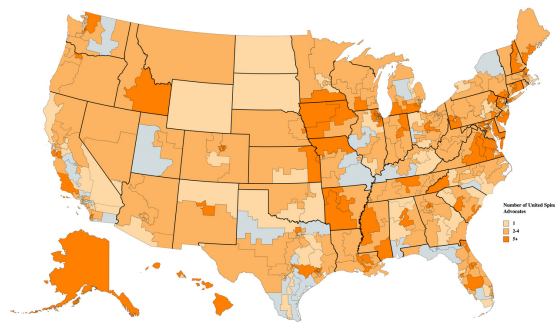
DISTRICT MOBILIZATION

The District Mobilization Initiative is focused on two primary goals: recruiting committed advocates all across the country who will commit to sending United Spinal's action alerts to their Members of Congress, and having those advocates serve as ambassadors for the SCI/D community with their lawmakers on Capitol Hill.

There are people with SCI/D and other disabilities in every part of the country. We want to make sure that we have committed advocates in all 435 congressional district across the United States getting our message out to their Members of Congress.

Click below to find your:

[Elected Official](#)
[Congressional District](#)



Mobilize with us by [adding your name to our Grassroots Advocacy Network](#). The Grassroots Advocacy Network is for those advocates who want to be on the cutting edge of change. Congressional offices have to be made aware of the issues that the disability community cares about. So, we must have a solid base of advocates who can consistently send in our action alerts to their members of Congress. [You can click here for more information on United Spinal's Action Alerts.](#)

ADVOCATES IN ACTION: GROWING GRASSROOTS



KELLEY SIMONEAUX (VA) UNITED SPINAL ADVOCATE

In 2018, Kelley faced discrimination when an app based ridesharing driver refused to transport her wheelchair. Rightfully feeling wronged, Mrs. Simoneaux sought out all avenues available to voice her grievances and to bring attention to this issue.

In doing so, she filed a complaint with the ridesharing company via their app, called out the company and experience on social media, contacted news networks and shared her story with press, and filed a human rights violation in the county where the incident occurred.

As she shared her story, she began hearing from other wheelchair users about their own negative experiences using ridesharing. For many, the stories were similar, but for those who are unable to transfer into a car, the option of ridesharing commonly wasn't an option at all.

With further awareness of the current gaps in service, regulation and recourse, Kelley was driven to keep pushing. She worked for months to get a sit-down with corporate leadership from Uber, but left the meeting feeling demystified with the lack of enthusiasm the company showed in making accessibility improvement changes internally.

With that, Ms. Simoneaux made a commitment, "If they're not going to do it on their own, what I can do is help shape policy that will make them change how they operate." In the time since, she has done just that, working with legislators to fight for the changes needed to make ridesharing accessible for all.

