

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

Mark R. Warner

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Governor

March 21, 2005

Contact: Ellen Qualls

Phone: (804) 786-2211, x2379

Cell Phone: (804) 393-9429

Internet: www.governor.virginia.gov

Governor Warner Commemorates 20TH Anniversary of the Virginians With Disabilities Act

~Virginia Law Led the Nation in Providing Equal Rights for People With Disabilities~

RICHMOND - Governor Mark R. Warner today issued a proclamation recognizing the 20th anniversary of the passage of the Virginians With Disabilities Act. Signed by former Governor Charles S. Robb on March 21, 1985, the landmark Virginia law preceded the federal Americans With Disabilities Act by five years, and protects against discrimination in employment, housing, education, voting, transportation, and access to public accommodations. Nearly one million Virginians are protected by the Virginians With Disabilities Act.

“Virginia’s groundbreaking law has allowed a critically important segment of our citizenry to participate equally in all aspects of civic life,” said Governor Warner. “While we have much to celebrate looking back over the past 20 years, we should continue to be challenged to lead the nation toward total independence and participation for people with disabilities.”

Last year Governor Warner signed Executive Order Number 61, establishing the Olmstead Initiative, to comply with a 1999 U.S. Supreme Court ruling requiring states to provide services in the most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of qualified individuals with disabilities. In his first year in office, the governor promoted and signed legislation creating the Virginia Office for Protection and Advocacy, strengthening the role of the agency in protecting people with disabilities by making it independent of the executive branch.

This summer, the Department of Rehabilitative Services will coordinate a one-day symposium on the Virginians With Disabilities Act. The event will bring together people with disabilities, community and business leaders, family members, advocates and government officials to evaluate the Act’s accomplishments and develop an action plan for future progress. The Department of Rehabilitative Services is the state agency that provides comprehensive programs and services to help people with disabilities maximize their employment and independence.

###