

March 25, 2014

Statewide Independent Living Council
c/o Sam Liss
859 Kansas Road
East Arlington, VT 05252

To all Members of the Statewide Independent Living Council:

Children are Vermont's greatest natural resource. As the adults who care for them, it is our duty to help them reach their highest potential, in both academics and personal character. The SILC-sponsored Include! K-12 curriculum fulfils both of these duties. First, it brings an important and largely untold piece of our history into the classroom. Second, it teaches self-sufficiency, self-esteem and respect for others.

My father fought in World War II and lost both of his legs in combat. He returned to Vermont in a wheelchair, but refused to let that stop him from living his life to the fullest. I lost him when I was 11 years old, but when I think of him, I don't remember him as a man with a disability. I remember him for all the things he did for me, my mother and my brothers, and how involved he was in our lives. While others may have seen him as disabled, I saw him as someone who let nothing get in the way of being a wonderful dad and a great inspiration to many.

The Vermont Legislature recently passed the "Respectful Language" bill, which has since been signed into law. This is a huge step for Vermont in recognizing that respect, inclusion and integration for people with disabilities is an expectation, not a choice. This new curriculum gives me hope that future generations will be effortlessly respectful, as these concepts won't be "new ideas" for them, but rather life as they've always known it. I applaud the efforts of all in this room and thank you for ensuring that Vermont's children continue to lead by example and find new ways to make us proud.

Sincerely,

Phil Scott