



## Words Matter

By Max Barrows in 2014

Green Mountain Self-Advocates worked on a Respectful Language Bill. This bill passed through the legislature in 2014. The purpose of the bill is to remove any demeaning language from state laws that refers to persons with disabilities. Our interest in passing a bill was in response to Rosa's Law, a federal law that eliminates the "r" word from federal laws and replaces it with the term intellectual disability.

Not so long ago, the term "Mental Retardation" did not have any intention of putting down persons with disabilities, but times have changed. Now, in our everyday culture, the "r" word and other demeaning language is used as slang and to insult other people. Persons with disabilities say they have been insulted with the "r" word. We see this in school settings, movies, social networking and on the street. Other state self-advocacy organizations are currently advocating for respectful language and attitudes. GMSA felt like it was time to do the same.

This is a great opportunity for bringing awareness to the public on this issue and to educate people about the importance of being respectful. Unfortunately, there are a lot of people who don't walk in our shoes. They're not aware of how we feel, having to hear these words. I strongly recommend that more GMSA members contact their local legislators to thank them for voting for the Respectful Language Bill and tell them why this is important to you!