



Special Olympics Delegates Make Case of Impact and Need for Critical Funding on Capitol Hill

Representatives of Special Olympics Indiana and programs from across the nation took part this week in the organization's 15th annual Capitol Hill Day.



WASHINGTON, D.C. — Special Olympics athletes, Program leaders, Unified Partners, and family members from 39 states and the District of Columbia converged on Capitol Hill on Feb. 15 for Special Olympics' 15th annual "Capitol Hill Day."

The delegates—among them Special Olympics Indiana CEO Mike Furnish and Cass County athlete Kevin Callaghan—held more than 250 face-to-face meetings with Members of Congress in both the House and Senate, challenging and inviting their elected officials to partner with them to achieve the goals of expanding Special Olympics Unified Sports and

Unified Champion School programming throughout the U.S., and to end health care disparities and discrimination against persons with intellectual disabilities.

U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos participated in an event held to launch Capitol Hill Day, the first time in the 15-year history of the event that a Secretary of Education has participated. DeVos heard first-hand from athletes and family members about the impact Special Olympics has made in their lives and why continued federal support is critical to Special Olympics' work in education and schools.

Secretary DeVos pledged her support to partner with Special Olympics to make its vision of expanding Unified Champion Schools and inclusive schools a reality, telling attendees: "I am proud to stand beside you as a partner in support of Special Olympics and its Unified Champion Schools, an important program that promotes leadership and empowers students to be agents of change."

The goals of Capitol Hill Day were to effectively convey the high impact and cost-effectiveness of Special Olympics' evidence-based programming that addresses these issues, to educate lawmakers, and to secure continued support from legislators. Acting as self-advocates, Special Olympics athletes educated their counterparts about the significant consequences that arise from the stigma and stereotypes faced by people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. They described how that impacts their lives in the areas of sports, healthcare, and education.

"No one can better articulate a vision for how America can become a more inclusive nation or demonstrate what it means to unite and come together than the athletes and Unified Partners of Special Olympics" said Tim Shriver, Chairman of Special Olympics. "We support the preservation of laws that guarantee the rights and full participation and integration of people with intellectual disabilities into our society."

In more than 4,400 Unified Champion Schools across the country, Special Olympics has trained and mobilized youth leaders and educators to create more inclusive schools by including students with intellectual disabilities in all aspects of school life. Students with and without intellectual disabilities are also playing and competing together, on the same team, through Special Olympics Unified Sports. These experiences are helping to increase acceptance of all abilities to classrooms across the country, and are reducing stigma and bullying.

Health exams, treatment and referrals (vision, hearing, dentistry, podiatry, and mobility), and education, including nutrition, are being provided to Special Olympics athletes at Games and competitions to ensure their health on the playing field. Thousands of volunteers, staff and clinical practitioners are providing essential health care that is otherwise often unavailable to people with intellectual disabilities due to the lack of trained health care providers and facilities. These volunteers are learning new skills that are helping the medical community to reach people with intellectual disabilities in their own communities with critical health care.

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ABOUT SPECIAL OLYMPICS INDIANA

Special Olympics Indiana is a not-for-profit organization that provides year-round sports training and athletic competition in more than 20 Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, reaching more than 12,000 athletes across Indiana. The organization receives no federal or state appropriated funds, is not a United Way agency, and relies entirely on corporate, civic and individual donations. For more information about Special Olympics Indiana, call (317) 328-2000 or visit www.soindiana.org.

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