

July 19, 2011

Truitt's "Respectful Language" Bill Effective September 1

To some, the "R" word hurts.

Austin — Today in Austin, Governor Rick Perry hosted a ceremonial bill signing for persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities (ID). On a personal level, the signing of HB 1481, by state Rep. Vicki Truitt (R-Keller) scores a moral victory for ID groups during an otherwise tough legislative session where a tight budget took center stage, and health and human services to the same population were cut.

Currently, individuals who receive services from certain state agencies are required to have the term "mental retardation" used to describe the agencies' clientele. But persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities find the term "mentally retarded" highly offensive and hurtful.

Rep. Truitt said, "Those affected are people first, and there is a stigma associated with the "R" word. It costs nothing to adopt verbiage in state statutes to reflect the fact that we recognize individuals and their uniqueness, without using offensive terms to categorize and label these good Texans."

The new law will require that, over time, the language used in statute and within various state agencies referencing persons with intellectual disabilities be changed to reference the person, rather than as the mentally retarded.

Truitt's House Bill 1481 was broadly supported and easily passed during the recent 82nd Session of the Texas Legislature, but she said that some believed the bill to be a pointless attempt to be politically correct.

"There was some grumbling about my "politically correct (PC)" bill from a few legislators, and I was contacted by a constituent who said her sister is mentally retarded, and that she is not offended that her sister is referred to as such. But I had to wonder at the time what her sister thought about the matter," said Truitt. She continued, "To those who think this is a fluffy, do-nothing bill, I would just ask them to momentarily put themselves in the position of one with an intellectual disability and imagine how hurtful it is to be called retarded. Intellectually disabled does not mean, 'without feelings'."

Representative Truitt is a seventh term legislator from Tarrant County representing the people of Grapevine, Colleyville, Southlake, Keller, Westlake, and parts of Trophy Club and far North Fort Worth.