

ADVOCACY

People First of Toledo Monthly Newsletter



**People First
of
Toledo**



Marriage Rights

By Quinn Thomas

As many of you are aware, under the current legal system, a disabled person who gets married loses some benefits, sometimes all benefits, even up to health care. Disabled people are more than twice as likely than nondisabled people to live in poverty, and on average need an extra \$17,690 per year just to reach the same standard of living as a similar nondisabled person. With significantly higher healthcare costs for specialized services, having access to these benefits is life and death. For decades, disabled people have been forbidden to marry if they want to have enough money to live.

This is an even bigger problem in states that recognize common-law marriage, like Ohio.

UPCOMING EVENTS

"BE SAFE" TRAINING

Free safety training for I/DD individuals on how to interact with law enforcement.

Registration is closed. Parent session is the 10th from 6-8, certificate course is the 11th from 8:30-4:00 and the 12th from 11:30-2:00 at LCBDD Training Center.

WEDNESDAY WALKS

For 6 consecutive Wednesdays from 5:30-7:00 starting April 6th. The last will be at Oak Openings, hiking the Light Blue Trail and meeting up at Mallard Lake.

SUPER SATURDAY DANCE

May 7th from 7:00-9:00, Five Lakes Church gymnasium. For DD individuals and caregivers.

A couple who are "living as married" and consider each other spouses are at just as much risk as legally married couples.

Couples where one spouse became disabled later in life have been forced to divorce to afford things like cancer treatment.

The penalties for disability insurance fraud can go up to a maximum of 5 years prison sentence and a \$250,000 fine. People who aid others in committing disability insurance fraud face worse consequences-- felony charges and up to ten years in jail.

The New Law

Things will not always be this way.

Marriage equality was won for interracial couples and LGBTQ+ couples, and it can happen for disabled people too.

Congressman Jimmy Panetta introduced a new bill called the Marriage Equality For Disabled Adults Act back in January. This law would eliminate marriage penalties in four different ways:

- Get rid of the law that a DAC beneficiary has to be unmarried
- Get rid of the law that takes away benefits from you if you get married
- Change Social Security's rules about common law marriages
- Make it so that a couple can get married without either of them losing SSI or Medicaid benefits

Current laws make things even harder for two disabled people to marry each other, and for those who have been disabled since birth or early life-- like I/DD individuals.

This bill would not affect *all* marriage penalties, and there are funding issues to consider. It has been introduced in the House of Representatives and is currently being debated.



OUR NEXT MEETING

We are back to in-person meetings! Our May People First meeting will be in the Overlander Room of the Ability Center. As usual, it's the third Thursday of the month, May 19th, starting at 6:00 and running 'til about 7:30. Please bring \$5 for the meeting fee or \$50 for the year. This money funds trips and paid activities for the group. Anyone interested in disability self-advocacy is welcome.