



PRESS RELEASE

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Disability Act 2017 is Milestone Legislation

The Minister for Equality, the Hon Samantha Sacramento MP, has delivered on a further milestone for equality. The Disability Act 2017, which will also be known as Agnes' Law, was passed in Parliament yesterday.

The 1992 Disabled People Act was outdated and failed to meet the needs of a modern inclusive society such as the one that this Government is keen to establish. It has therefore been repealed and substituted by this new legislation, which aims to create an equal playing field in all aspects of society for people with disabilities.

The Disability Act, Agnes' Law, is modelled on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in a way that is relevant to our community. Whilst the fundamental right not to be unfairly discriminated against is already enshrined in the Constitution, this new legislation will provide further safeguards; it clarifies existing obligations and duties and provides a framework to give practical effect to the Convention's and this Government's aims, which is to provide equal enjoyment by all.

In Parliament yesterday, Minister Sacramento noted that stigma, prejudice and discrimination against individuals with disabilities is unfortunately still prevalent and that although there is still a long way to go in changing cultural norms, perceptions and attitudes, this law aims to build on and give effect to the right not be treated less favourably and put the rights of people with disabilities on an equal footing with everyone else's.

The Minister for Equality also noted that the law by itself was not enough and in order for it to be meaningful, continuous education, awareness and training were essential to ensure that the community properly understands its obligations and becomes more responsible in the way that it treats people with disabilities.

The legislation is named in honour of the late Agnes Valarino, former Chairperson of the Disability Society, who was dedicated to the rights of people with disabilities and whose ambition was to see legislation specifically for people with disabilities.



The Chief Minister, the Hon Fabian Picardo QC MP, said: “Historically, disability legislation has been an area of our law that has been overlooked. Equality is an important principle for my Government and Minister Sacramento has once again led on delivering for our community. Agnes’ law represents another pioneering step for this Government. Minister Sacramento is the most committed advocate for the advancement of civil rights of all the members of this Parliament and I commend for a magnificent job in that respect. I also commend the work of those advocates who have fought so hard to achieve this important milestone.”

Minister for Equality, the Hon Samantha Sacramento MP said: “I am proud to be part of a Government that has an ongoing commitment to and delivers on Equality. This is not a new subject matter - it is one that has existed for many years - but has only come to the forefront and been given its due importance since our Government took office and made significant advancements in this field on many fronts. We have raised the profile of the rights and abilities of people with disabilities in a way that is unprecedented and we will of course continue.

“The ultimate purpose of the Disability Act is to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all fundamental rights and freedoms by people with disabilities and to promote respect for their inherent dignity. This new law is therefore a significant step forward and will make important changes to the lives of people with disabilities and their families.

“We need everybody to embrace the principle of disability equality and while as a Government we have provided a statutory framework, as citizens we each have an individual and collective responsibility to go beyond this and make Gibraltar a place that is inclusive of people with disabilities.

“I have referred to the law as Agnes’ Law as I felt that it was a fitting tribute to a lady who was a true pioneer and champion of the rights of people with disabilities in Gibraltar.

“I am grateful to the Disability Society and all the other Disability NGOs and individuals I have worked with, as well as to the Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of Small Business and the Unite Equalities Committee.”