Disability Tips and Best Practices for Legislators and Staff

General Disability Etiquette Best Practices

• Every person with a disability is different and every interaction with a person with a disability will be different.

• Not every disability is visible.

• Speak to the person with the disability first and not the companion.

• Never assume that because the individual does not talk that she/he does not understand or that she/he is not smart.

• Communication should be concise, simple, clear, and jargon free.

• Refer to the person first, not the disability. For example, ‘a woman who uses a wheelchair. not “a wheelchair-bound woman.’

• If a constituent looks as though he/she needs help, first ask if he or she would like assistance, then wait for specific instructions.

• Under the ADA, a service animal is a dog that has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for a person with a disability.

• According to the ADA, there are 2 questions you can ask regarding a service animal: 1) Is this a service animal? 2) What work or task has the dog been trained to do?

• The service animal is always working; do not interact with the animal.

Cognitive Disabilities

• Plan extra time for meetings to accommodate constituents with information processing difficulties.

• Allow pauses for the person to process what has been said and formulate a response.

• Provide constituents a written synopsis of what is discussed in the meeting.

Visual Disabilities

• When approaching someone, introduce yourself; let a person know you want to shake his/her hand.
• Verbalize common body language and non-verbal communication. Say yes or no instead of shaking your head.

• Do not avoid words like “see” and “look” as part of common phrases. For example, “It is nice to see you.”

**Hearing Disabilities**

• Face a constituent during conversation so that he/she has an unobstructed view of your face and mouth.

• Speak at a normal volume and rate of speech.

• American Sign Language is not an exact translation of English; it has its own grammar rules and style.

• Speak directly to the person, not the interpreter.

**Mobility Disabilities**

• Maximize width and clear floor space within your office. If this is not possible, identify an alternative accessible meeting space.

• Mobility aides and devices, such as a wheelchair, are viewed as extensions of the person. Avoid touching the wheelchair; the wheelchair is considered his/her personal space.

• When communicating with a person in a wheelchair, find a way to be at eye level with her/him. Find a chair or seating for the conversation when possible.

*If you would like further information, resources, and training, contact Bri Conley, Public Policy and Advocacy Manager, at 314 289-4304 or by email at bconley@paraquad.org.*