

The United States Constitution starts with the words "We the people," and attached to it is a Bill Of Rights, which sets out individual liberties and justice and the opportunity for people to have equal treatment under the law.

At this point now, I have the high honor of presenting the Rights of People with Cognitive Disabilities and Technology Access.

The Declaration of Rights for People with Cognitive Disabilities to Technology and Information is really a statement of where we think the American Disabilities Act left off.

It outlines the various ways in which people with disabilities should have the same kind of access to technology and internet and all forms of interaction and today's technological world.

Also, it promotes a definition of disability based on the social model-- where the focus is on the individual-- and then to adapt the individual to society. But the focus is on the social barriers, encountered by people in general, they need to adapt society to the wide range of abilities that exist in society.

But what's most important about the Declaration is it is a joint declaration where many organizations from across the country-- representing various components of the disability field-- have come together and agreed on this statement around the principles in the declaration.

And a lot of people know that technology is moving, and they embrace it, and they adapt to it really quickly. But they may not be aware that people are being left behind, that we're creating a bigger and bigger digital divide between the people that have the technology information access, and those that do not.

Technology is so important to connect people with each other, to be able to help people get around the community in terms of transportation. And so I think there's a huge social aspect to technology for people with cognitive disabilities.

I think those social inclusion-- nowadays, there's many different things on the internet that help people be more social. There it is Facebook, there's Twitter, there's many other websites that people need to have access to be a part of so that they can interact in the community and the things that are happening that make a difference in their lives.

It can be the help that someone needs to go to work. It can be to help that someone needs to live in their home, or to read a book, or to listen to music.

Technology is opening up avenues for people to feel fully participating members of society that wouldn't have existed and don't exist without these technologies. But it's more than that for people with cognitive disabilities. It's a means for them to live lives that are much fuller than the lives they they live now, live quality lives, and live lives that are as much like the rest of the world as they want to.

The technology use just not just for fun and games. If you can't navigate technology in our society, you have limited access to work, to living in the community, to a whole array of things. If we don't begin to address this now, people with cognitive disabilities are going to be further discriminated against in all aspects of life.

People with visual impairments often use screen reader technology. People with hearing impairments may use captioning. People with cognitive disabilities use all of those activities, and also require content from the web-- digital knowledge-- that is usable, understandable, relatively easy to use, and capable of equivalent knowledge transfer.

Fair access means that the cost of the technology is not a barrier to getting access to technology and using it. That the design of applications that give you access to information and not a barrier for people using those technologies to make choices and live the kinds of lives if they want to lead.

Each cognitive disability has different aspects. Software should be able to interact at that level.

Fair access is when individuals with cognitive disabilities have at their disposal smartphones, tablet devices, web access in such a way that they can accomplish what they want to do with those devices.

If we don't take action now to make sure that they are included through accessible design, they will forever be excluded from society as the rest of people will continue to communicate and live and learn on a platform that is not accessible to other people with cognitive disabilities. It's just-- it's that important. It's that important.