



EXHIBIT 6  
DATE 3/23/05  
SB 485

# MONTANA ADVOCACY PROGRAM, INC.

*The Civil Rights Protection & Advocacy System for the State of Montana*

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March 23, 2005

House Judiciary Committee  
Rep. Diane Rice, Chairman

## **RE : SB 485, Next-of-Kin Registry**

Dear Madame Chairman and Members of the Committee,

The Montana Advocacy Program asks for your support of SB 485, for the benefit of people with disabilities.

People with disabilities are unmarried and childless at much higher rates than people without disabilities. There are many reasons for this, ranging from financial disincentives to marriage, especially loss of Medicaid coverage, to marital breakup caused by the onset of disability.

People with disabilities also experience medical crisis at higher rates than people without disabilities.

As a result, MAP is approached every year by people with disabilities whose partners are not being admitted into their hospital rooms, not being included in medical information-sharing and generally not recognized as family by medical providers. This is a source of stress and humiliation during a time of great difficulty for the person with the disability.

SB 485 is an inexpensive, accessible and commonsensical way for people with disabilities to plan for crisis. Especially for people with mental disabilities, durable powers of attorney, advance directives, living wills and other legal modes of planning for crisis can be confusing and intimidating.

But an even more important benefit of the kinship registry for people with disabilities is dignity. There is dignity in the recognition of medical providers and dignity in legal recognition for the most important relationship in an individual's life.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of these issues.

Yours truly,

Anita Roessmann, Staff Attorney

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