

THE BASIS OF ADVOCACY: FIRST AMENDMENT OF THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. – First Amendment, Bill of Rights, United States Constitution

The First Amendment gives United States citizens - including you – the right to free speech, to assemble, and to petition the government. Put another way, the First Amendment gives the brain injury community the right to advocate.

“The First Amendment also enables the Brain Injury Association of New Jersey to produce and publish this newsletter you are reading,” states Barbara Geiger-Parker, President/CEO of the Brain Injury Association of New Jersey. “It also gives us the power to work with the press to get important messages related to brain injury out to the public.”

“The Council for the Head Injured Community [CHIC] is a clear example of the First Amendment in action,” says Edwin Rivas, Board Member of the Association and chairperson of CHIC. “CHIC comes together on a regular basis and discusses topics of interest. Ultimately, they exercise their rights under the First Amendment through educating others or advocating a change in public policy before lawmakers,” he added.

“Advocacy can lead to change in public policy which impacts the lives of people impacted by brain injury. Advocacy has empowered the Brain Injury Association of New Jersey to come together and petition the government to create laws which speak to the mission and vision of the Association, says John Tiene, Chairperson of the Board of Trustees for the Brain Injury Association of New Jersey. “The First Amendment enabled us to establish the TBI Fund, create the TBI Advisory Council, declare the Month of March as Brain Injury Awareness Month, increase funding for community-based services for people with brain injury and increase the age under which children must wear helmets when bicycling, skateboarding, and rollerskating from under age 14 to under age 17,” he added. “None of this would have been possible without the First Amendment.”

What does this mean for you, the reader of this article? It means that you are a beneficiary of the First Amendment. You have the freedom speak about your concerns. You have the right to raise awareness of brain injury through the press. You have the right to assemble with others to address topics and issues of interest to you and the brain injury community. You have the right to petition your government through your elected officials and advocate change in public policy.

The First Amendment is your Right as a United States citizen and person impacted by brain injury. This Right, which some in the world do not have, can be a powerful tool in changing your life and the lives of others. It should be honored and, most importantly, used. Use it!