NARRATOR: All people deserve basic human rights.

That's why Congress created a system of

protection and advocacy agencies, also known as

P&As to protect and advocate for

the rights of people with disabilities, because

in the past, they have not been treated equally.

For most to the 20th century,

the phrase "Out of sight, out of mind"

was more than just a popular saying.

It was the means for dealing with an unwanted segment

of the population.

People with disabilities were either segregated

from society, locked away in institutions,

or, remained isolated at home with

absolutely no services,

not even an education.

They [people with disabilities] were abused,

neglected, and forgotten.

Then, in 1973, ABC news cameras exposed

the filthy living conditions and poor treatment

inside Staten Island's Willowbrook School, which

housed people with developmental

and intellectual disabilities.

It shocked the nation.

REPORTER: The doctor had warned me

that it would be bad. It was horrible.

NARRATOR: Finally, in 1975, Congress acted.

They mandated that every US state and territory

have an official protection and advocacy agency.

P&As go by many names,

but their mission is the same:

To protect and advocate for the rights of people

with disabilities.

Together, the P&As form

the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN),

taking on issues affecting people with

all kinds of disabilities.

No other organizations have the sweeping

access authority that P&As have.

They go anywhere services for people with disabilities

are provided, from schools to hospitals,

to prisons and jails, to monitor conditions

and listen to concerns.

They make sure people with disabilities are treated

equally, with dignity and respect,

and never have to face the same kind of

mistreatment they saw at Willowbrook.

P&As ask the public for input on which issues

to take on in their communities.

P&As can fight against abuse and neglect

in residential services,

to end exploitation at work,

for fair treatment in the criminal justice system,

for equal access to public education and voting,

for accessible communities and services,

and assistive technologies, and countless other issues.

That's the protection and advocacy system.

Click here to find the P&A for your state or territory,

and subscribe for more videos from the P&A network

at Rooted in Rights.