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## A challenge to choose your words

From: Vernon DeHaven Aberdeen 9 hrs ago



Words matter. That's why The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region (The Arc NCR) is helping me respectfully challenge our community to think about the words they use when it comes to addressing or referencing people with disabilities.

My name is Vernon, and I live in Harford County. I have received services from The Arc NCR for many years, and am now the president of our advocacy group, "People First." We are issuing a local, state and national "People First Language Pledge" for people to make changes in how they think and talk. It is our hope this movement will educate people to put the person first, not their disability.

One in five Americans is a person with a disability, but people are not and should not be defined by one thing alone. We do not say someone is cancerous, so why does society continue to say someone is disabled? Instead, it is someone *with* a disability. It is hurtful when people label me based on how I was born. I am a person, just like anyone else, with hobbies (go Ravens!) and great family and friends.

Words matter. For example, I use a wheelchair. Please do not say, “Vernon is wheelchair-bound,” which suggests I am physically tied down. I need “accessible parking,” not “handicapped parking” — this parking is meant to be accessible, regardless of who is using it.



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Will you pledge not to use the “R-Word” (retard) and other disability labels that may be degrading? I hope you will join us in putting people first. To sign the People First Language Pledge, visit [arcncr.org/about/pledge](http://arcncr.org/about/pledge) or learn more by calling 410-836-7177.