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Helen Keller Deaf-Blind Awareness Week, 1985

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

The sights and sounds of the world around us are among the gifts we cherish most. But for approximately 40,000 Americans who are both deaf and blind, seeing and hearing exist only as dreams. Through an accident of birth or illness, these men and women may never gaze at the splendor of a spring garden or listen to the voices of their loved ones. Cut off from what most of us take for granted, people who can neither see nor hear live in a kind of solitary confinement.

This month marks the 102nd anniversary of the birth of an American who found herself in such a prison—and broke out of it. At the age of 19 months, Helen Keller lost her sight, hearing, and speech, and her formative years were spent in utter isolation. But she had two powerful forces on her side: an absolute determination to overcome her handicaps, and the devotion of one person, Annie Sullivan, who recognized the child's innate abilities and helped her construct a bridge to the world at large.

Today, the scientific and medical communities are showing great determination to build more bridges for deaf-and-blind individuals. Research on disorders that cause deaf-blindness is being conducted and supported on several fronts: by the Federal government through the National Institute of Neurological and Communicative Disorders and Stroke, and the National Eye Institute; by universities and other institutions of higher learning; and by voluntary health agencies and numerous groups in the private sector.

America can ill afford to lose the contributions of her deaf-and-blind citizens. Helen Keller became renowned for her writings and her civic spirit at a time when the study of deaf-blindness was in its infancy. Scientific progress will enable the deaf-and-blind to utilize their talents and ideas, and expand their educational and employment opportunities, thereby increasing their contributions to our society.

To focus public attention on deaf-blindness and the hope through research of someday averting this tragedy, the Congress, by Senate Joint Resolution 125, has designated the week of June 23 through 29, 1985, as "Helen Keller Deaf-Blind Awareness Week" and authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation to observe this week.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim the week of June 23 through June 29, 1985, as Helen Keller Deaf-Blind Awareness Week. I call upon all government agencies, health organizations, communications media, and the people of the United States to observe this week with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-sixth day of June, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-five, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and ninth.

Ronald Reagan