

Bill Removing ‘Mental Retardation’ From Law Clears Senate

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Before leaving for a summer break, Senators unanimously approved legislation to replace the term “mental retardation” with “intellectual disability” in some areas of federal government.

The bill, known as “Rosa’s Law,” would impact health, education and labor policy at the federal level. Under the measure, individuals with disabilities would retain the same rights they currently have, but the terminology would be swapped as laws and documents come up for revision over the next several years. As a result, the measure is not expected to incur any cost.

Now, the bill must go before the House of Representatives and gain the support of the president to take effect.

“The bill is simple in nature but profound in what it will do when it is enacted,” said Sen. Mike Enzi, R-Wyo., one of the bill sponsors. “Rosa’s Law will make a greatly-needed change that should have been made well before today and it will encourage us to treat people the way they would like to be treated.”

The move in Congress to revise terminology comes as nearly every state now favors the term “intellectual disability.” What’s more, some federal agencies including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention already use the new language.

Rosa’s Law is named for Rosa Marcellino, a Maryland girl with Down syndrome. Similar legislation proposed in the House is known as the Elizabeth A. Connelly Act in honor of a former member of the New York Assembly who was influential in pushing for services for those with disabilities.