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# Bonner v. Lewis: Testing Society's Commitment To Aid Individuals With Handicaps

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973<sup>1</sup> (Rehabilitation Act) is a culmination of decades of work to improve support and provide vocational rehabilitation for handicapped individuals.<sup>2</sup> The objectives of the Rehabilitation Act fall into two basic categories. First, Congress sought to provide the assistance necessary "for individuals with handicaps . . . to maximize their employability."<sup>3</sup> In other words, Congress sought to help handicapped individuals achieve vocational rehabilitation. This objective was supported by a favorable cost/benefit analysis that indicated "the benefits of the rehabilitation program are many times its costs."<sup>4</sup>

It was also apparent that many people, particularly the se-

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1. Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. §§ 701-796i (Supp. IV 1986), amended by Pub. L. No. 100-259, 102 Stat. 28 (1988) [hereinafter Act].

Because the word "handicap" is used in the Act, this note will also use the term "handicap" to refer to the disabilities and physical challenges facing this group of people.

2. *Id.* at § 701. Congress initially acted to provide for the rehabilitative needs of the disabled at the end of World War I. S. REP. NO. 318, 93rd Cong., 1st Sess. 8, reprinted in 1973 U.S. CODE CONG. & ADMIN. NEWS 2076, 2083 [hereinafter Report]. Proposals focused first on returning veterans but provisions for the industrially disabled were soon included. *Id.* In 1920, the government enacted the first vocational rehabilitation program. *Id.* at 9.

Since the rehabilitation program's inception, amendments substantially enlarging the scope of the program were made. *Id.* at 9. These amendments expanded the public program to reach a larger number of handicapped individuals. In addition, the definition of "vocational rehabilitation services" was expanded to provide a wider variety of services necessary to achieve rehabilitation. *Id.* at 9-12.

In 1972, Congress began working to create what was to become the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. *Id.* at 12.

3. Act, *supra* note 1, § 2, 29 U.S.C. at § 701.

4. Report, *supra* note 2, at 12. The Committee on Labor and Public Welfare noted that the aggregate increase in earnings for rehabilitated persons (which contributes to an increase in both GNP and tax revenues) coupled with the reduction in public assistance dependency far outweighed the federal investment contemplated. *Id.* See also Cook, *The Scope of the Right to Meaningful Access and the Defense of Undue Burdens Under Disability Civil Rights Laws*, 20 LOY. L.A.L. REV. 1471, 1476-77 (1987).

verely handicapped, were neglected under past rehabilitation programs.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, Congress also sought to help individuals with handicaps achieve "independence and integration into . . . the community."<sup>6</sup> Thus, in addition to the economic benefits of vocational rehabilitation, Congress recognized the importance of aid offered simply to serve a "needy portion of the population."<sup>7</sup> The result of Congress' efforts was an act which, although focused on vocational rehabilitation, was meant to provide aid to more handicapped individuals than ever before.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act prohibits discrimination against a handicapped individual by any "program or activity receiving federal financial assistance."<sup>8</sup> *Bonner v. Lewis*<sup>9</sup> asks if section 504 of the Act requires services to be provided to an otherwise qualified handicapped person when the services provided will *not* lead to vocational rehabilitation.

In many instances, the Rehabilitation Act is used to provide assistance for vocational training. In those cases, both objectives of the Rehabilitation Act are served. Yet, *Bonner* presents a case where the objectives of vocational rehabilitation and humanitarian welfare assistance are divided. When a potential recipient will not benefit vocationally from the services provided, that person's general welfare alone may not be sufficient to bring him or her within the scope of the Rehabilitation Act. The commitment to this humanitarian objective is further tested when the potential recipient is a man convicted of a crime against society. In *Bonner*, the Ninth Circuit held that the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is an appropriate tool to provide aid to handicapped prisoners even if those prisoners appear unable to justify (through vocational rehabilitation) the cost incurred on their behalf.<sup>10</sup>

5. Report, *supra* note 2, at 12.

6. Act, *supra* note 1, § 2, 29 U.S.C. at § 701.

7. Report, *supra* note 2, at 12.

8. Section 504 states in part, "No otherwise qualified individual with handicaps in the United States, as defined in section 706(8) of this title, shall, solely by reason of his handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance . . ." Act, *supra* note 1, § 504, 29 U.S.C. at § 794.

9. 857 F.2d 559 (9th Cir. 1988), *on remand*, *Bonner v. Arizona Dep't of Corrections*, 714 F. Supp. 420 (D.C. Ariz. 1989).

10. *Id.* at 564. The issue of justifying costs is also relevant in areas such as AIDS victims seeking assistance under the Rehabilitation Act. See Note, *AIDS: Does it Qualify as a 'Handicap' Under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973?*, 61 NOTRE DAME L. REV. 572, 572 n.4 (1986) (concluding AIDS was a handicap under the Act but recognizing that victims may still need to justify the expenditures made on their behalf).

This note first discusses, in part II, the facts and holding of *Bonner*. Part III analyzes the court's holding and concludes that although the court's holding is correct, the court's reasoning does not provide the strongest framework available to support the holding. Finally, part IV discusses the legislative history of the Act (and its emphasis on vocational rehabilitation) and concludes that although aid to Bonner may not be used for *vocational* rehabilitation, the Rehabilitation Act's emphasis on humanitarian aid is sufficient to bring him within the scope of the Act.

## II. *Bonner v. Lewis*

### A. *The Facts of the Case*

Bonner, an inmate at the Arizona State Prison, is deaf, mute, and suffers from progressive vision loss.<sup>11</sup> Bonner can communicate effectively only by using American Sign Language (ASL).<sup>12</sup> Because none of the personnel at the prison knew ASL, prison officials attempted to communicate with Bonner either by using a telecommunication device (intended for use by telephone rather than face to face) or by using inmates (none of whom were skilled in ASL) to act as interpreters.<sup>13</sup> Bonner participated in several counseling, administrative and disciplinary sessions, received medical treatment, and visited a prison psychologist all without the aid of a qualified interpreter.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, he brought suit alleging that the failure to provide a qualified interpreter constituted a violation of section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.<sup>15</sup> At trial, the district court granted a motion for summary judgment against Bonner.<sup>16</sup>

Upon review, the Ninth Circuit held that section 504 did encompass handicapped prisoners in state prisons receiving federal funds.<sup>17</sup> The circuit court overruled the district court and

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11. 857 F.2d at 560.

12. *Id.*

13. *Id.* at 560-61.

14. *Id.* at 560.

15. *Id.* at 561. Bonner also alleged violations of his constitutional rights of due process, equal protection, and protection from cruel and unusual punishment. *Id.* at 561, 564-66.

16. *Id.* at 561.

17. *Id.* at 567.

remanded the case to determine whether the Rehabilitation Act had, in fact, been violated.<sup>18</sup>

### B. *The Reasoning of the Ninth Circuit*

In finding that section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act applied to Bonner, the court noted that this section had already been found to require sign language interpreters to be provided to deaf students attending schools receiving federal aid.<sup>19</sup> The court found that Bonner's situation was analogous to these cases in that both were participating in a program receiving federal funds.<sup>20</sup>

Additionally, the court pointed out that the United States Department of Justice had "promulgated regulations under section 504 which apply to correctional facilities receiving federal financial assistance."<sup>21</sup> Thus, using the federal regulations as "an important source of guidance on the meaning of section 504," the court found it appropriate to include the Arizona State Prison within the scope of section 504.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, the court noted that "the Act's goals . . . should in fact mirror the goals of prison officials as they attempt to rehabilitate prisoners and prepare them to lead productive lives . . . ." <sup>23</sup> Consequently, by providing the services sought by Bonner, "the goals of both the institution and the Rehabilitation Act are served."<sup>24</sup>

### III. DISCUSSION OF THE COURT'S ANALYSIS

Although the court correctly found that Bonner was entitled to aid under the Rehabilitation Act, the court failed to address several important issues in its analysis. First, the court erred in extending the deaf student's right to aid to include deaf prisoners. Second, the Department of Justice regulations cited as authority for the court's holding can be effectively circumvented. Third, the court's rationale that prison officials and the Rehabilitation Act have a congruent purpose ignores the context of the word "rehabilitation" and begs the issue presented. Finally, the

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18. *Id.* at 567.

19. *Id.* at 562.

20. *See id.*

21. *Id.*

22. *Id.* (quoting *School Board v. Arline*, 480 U.S. 273, 279 (1987)).

23. *Id.*

24. *Id.*

court failed to address pertinent language in the Rehabilitation Act itself which brings *Bonner* within its scope.

A. *The Court's Analogy to Deaf Students Overextends the Federal Regulations Requiring Aid to be Provided to the Handicapped*

The court indicated that two circuits had already found that section 504 required schools receiving federal aid to supply qualified deaf students with sign language interpreters.<sup>25</sup> In both cases, the courts looked to Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) regulations for guidance.<sup>26</sup> HEW expressly requires educational institutions that fall within the purview of its regulations to make whatever modifications are necessary to ensure non-discrimination of handicapped students.<sup>27</sup> In short, both circuit courts relied on regulations directed at educational institutions.<sup>28</sup>

Although HEW (or its modern-day counterpart) has authority to promulgate regulations to govern educational settings, these regulations do not necessarily apply to prisoners held in state correctional facilities. HEW regulations apply only to those institutions receiving funding *from that agency*.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, the Arizona State Prison is not bound by HEW regulations unless it receives funding from HEW.

In addition, a student seeking aid under the Rehabilitation Act does not present the same conflict that *Bonner* presents.<sup>30</sup> Providing aid to a student can be economically justified because the student can apply the knowledge gained in school to a career that will allow him or her to live in society free from government aid.<sup>31</sup> This is precisely the type of vocational rehabilitation Con-

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25. *Id.*

26. *Jones v. Illinois Dep't. of Rehabilitation Services*, 689 F.2d 724, 728 (7th Cir. 1982); *Camenisch v. Univ. of Texas*, 616 F.2d 127, 133 (5th Cir. 1980), *vacated*, 451 U.S. 390 (1981).

27. *See* 45 C.F.R. § 84.44 (1979). Although HEW is no longer in existence, this requirement remains valid under Department of Health and Human Services regulations. *See* 45 C.F.R. § 84.44 (1988).

28. *See supra*, note 26.

29. *See* 45 C.F.R. § 84.2 (1979). *See also* 45 C.F.R. § 84.2 (1987).

30. *See* text accompanying note 10.

31. *See generally* Cook, *supra* note 4, at 1502-03. President Reagan ordered a special task force to review current HEW regulations and to determine how the benefits to society could be maximized under a cost/benefit analysis and recommend any alternative approaches that would involve the least net cost to society. *Id.* at 1502-03 (citing Executive Order No. 12,291 § 2, 46 FED. REG. 13,193 (1981)). The task force recommended no

gress hoped recipients of aid under the Rehabilitation Act could attain.<sup>32</sup> Because the aid sought by Bonner is not directed toward vocational rehabilitation,<sup>33</sup> the student cases can be distinguished from *Bonner*. For these reasons, the conclusion that because aid should be provided to students attending federally funded educational institutions, aid should also be provided to prisoners of federally funded correctional institutions does not necessarily follow.

*B. The Department of Justice Regulations are Subject to an 'Institutional Prerogative' Loophole*

Next, the court cited Department of Justice regulations implementing section 504 of the Act<sup>34</sup> which "apply to correctional facilities receiving federal financial assistance."<sup>35</sup> These regulations require correctional facilities to "provide appropriate auxiliary aids to qualified handicapped persons with impaired sensory, manual, or speaking skills where a refusal to make such provision would discriminatorily impair or exclude the participation of such persons . . . ."<sup>36</sup> As long as the Arizona State Prison is receiving federal funds<sup>37</sup> from the Department of Justice, these regulations clearly support the court's holding that prisoners of correctional institutions receiving federal aid fall within the purview of the Rehabilitation Act.

However, this line of reasoning leaves an important loophole

changes be made. *Id.* at 1503 (citing 129 CONG. REC. 53,672 (1983)).

32. See *supra* note 4 and accompanying text.

33. See *supra* note 13 and accompanying text.

34. 28 C.F.R. § 42.501 (1980).

35. *Bonner v. Lewis*, 857 F.2d 559, 562 (9th Cir. 1988), *on remand*, *Bonner v. Arizona Dep't of Corrections*, 714 F. Supp. 420 (D.C. Ariz. 1989).

A potential issue arises as to whether the Department of Justice intended 28 C.F.R. § 42 Subpart H (implementation of section 504) to apply to those employed by correctional institutions receiving federal aid or to all participants in those institutions. This subpart appears to apply to the latter for two reasons.

First, 28 C.F.R. § 42.503 states that one of the discriminatory actions prohibited is to "[d]eny a qualified handicapped person the opportunity accorded others to *participate* in the program receiving Federal financial assistance." *Id.* at § 42.503 (b)(1)(i)(emphasis added).

Second, 28 C.F.R. § 42.510-13 expressly prohibits agencies receiving federal aid from discriminating in employing any qualified handicapped person. Because these subsections deal specifically with employment discrimination, assuming that the rest of subpart H was intended to apply to participants who are not necessarily employees is logical.

36. 857 F.2d at 562 (citing 28 C.F.R. § 42.503(f)(1980)).

37. By using this argument, the court implies that the prison is in fact receiving federal funds. *Id.* at 561-62.

open to the Department of Justice. The Department of Justice is allowed an institutional prerogative to ignore regulations for situations which would prove too burdensome to be implemented.<sup>38</sup> Ironically, the agency itself is allowed to determine which situations meet that standard.<sup>39</sup>

This loophole highlights the conflict presented by *Bonner*. Yet, the Department of Justice's institutional prerogative resolves the conflict in favor of the vocational rehabilitation's cost/benefit analysis. Simply stated, if the cost of aid via Department of Justice regulations cannot be justified through the vocational rehabilitation, that regulation can be effectively ignored as too burdensome.

By participating in vocational training programs while in prison, Bonner could be taught how to remain financially independent. Because this is more likely to be economically justifiable,<sup>40</sup> the Department of Justice should be less likely to exercise its institutional prerogative.

However, if the programs provided do not deal with vocational training, no future economic benefits will be available to counterbalance the costs of providing Bonner with a sign language interpreter. Unfortunately, the programs to which Bonner sought access would not provide him with vocational training.<sup>41</sup> Even with those programs, Bonner will be in no better position to work independently than he was before. Consequently, providing aid to Bonner does not appear to be economically justifiable.

Although criticized,<sup>42</sup> the Department of Justice's "institutional prerogative" remains a potential loophole. Consequently, while the regulation appears in form to dictate that assistance be given to Bonner, in reality, Bonner may be effectively foreclosed from any aid.

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38. 28 C.F.R. §§ 39.150(a)(2), 39.160(d) (1988). See also Cook, *supra* note 4, at 1512.

39. 28 C.F.R. §§ 39.150(a)(2), 39.160(d) (1988).

40. See Report, *supra* note 2.

41. The programs which Bonner complained he was precluded from participating in were administrative, medical, and disciplinary proceedings. See *supra* note 14 and accompanying text.

42. See Cook, *supra* note 4, at 1512-21. But see 28 C.F.R. Ch.1 Pt.39, Editorial Note, pp. 391-92 (1988).



C. *The Court Misuses the Word 'Rehabilitate' to Bring Bonner within the Scope of the Rehabilitation Act*

Finally, the court stated that the legislative intent of the Rehabilitation Act coincided with the goal of prison officials because both "prepare [recipients] to lead productive lives . . . ." <sup>43</sup> Therefore, by assuring that "inmates have meaningful access to prison activities, . . . the goals of both the institution and the Rehabilitation Act are served." <sup>44</sup>

Yet, while both programs share the goal of rehabilitation, a subtle distinction exists in the meaning of the word "rehabilitation" as used in each context. This distinction may be enough to render the court's argument invalid.

The meaning of rehabilitation as used in relation to prisoners is to help prepare them to interact productively rather than destructively in society. <sup>45</sup> Teaching economic or vocational independence would be secondary to teaching one to respect the laws of the land. The disciplinary hearing and counseling to which Bonner seeks meaningful access are an important part of the *correctional* rehabilitative process.

Yet, the Rehabilitation Act was created to provide *vocational* rehabilitation to those individuals qualified to receive aid. <sup>46</sup> Vocational rehabilitation seeks to increase the working skills of those individuals. <sup>47</sup> Despite the fact that the Rehabilitation Act expressly discusses *vocational* rehabilitation as a primary rehabilitative goal, <sup>48</sup> the court makes the jump from vocational rehabilitation to correctional rehabilitation without explaining why a vocational basis is no longer necessary.

In short, while both correctional rehabilitation and vocational rehabilitation are important societal interests, they are not necessarily synonymous. For this reason, the fact that both prison officials and the Rehabilitation Act seek to "rehabilitate" is not necessarily sufficient to bring Bonner within the scope of the Rehabilitation Act.

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43. *Bonner v. Lewis*, 857 F.2d 559, 562 (9th Cir. 1988), *on remand*, *Bonner v. Arizona Dep't of Corrections*, 714 F. Supp. 420 (D.C. Ariz. 1989).

44. *Id.*

45. See 60 AM. JUR. 2D *Penal and Correctional Institutions* § 1 (1987).

46. See *supra* text accompanying note 3.

47. Act, *supra* note 1, § 100, 29 U.S.C. at § 720.

48. See *supra* note 2 and accompanying text.

#### IV. THE LEGISLATIVE HISTORY OF THE ACT SUPPORTS THE COURT'S HOLDING

One argument remains which, without relying on federal regulations, brings Bonner's circumstances within the scope of the Act. An important goal of the Rehabilitation Act is to aid qualified handicapped persons in learning a vocation, gaining employment, and integrating successfully into society.<sup>49</sup> Yet, from the time Congress created the initial rehabilitation program to the present time, the group of individuals "qualified" to receive aid has repeatedly been expanded.<sup>50</sup>

For example, in 1965 an amendment to the Rehabilitation Act's predecessor removed any age requirement as a prerequisite to receiving aid.<sup>51</sup> People who were considered to be too young had been precluded from obtaining necessary services because even after overcoming their handicaps, they would be too young to participate in the work force. Simply put, the investment made on their behalf was not cost effective.

Although a valid economic argument, this barrier was replaced with a lower standard. Instead of an age requirement, a potential recipient is allowed to receive assistance when it is determined that his or her "long-term vocational *potential*" is enhanced.<sup>52</sup>

As with its predecessor, the Rehabilitation Act contemplates providing assistance long before the costs of doing so can be economically justified.<sup>53</sup> The Committee on Labor and Public Welfare (Committee) suggests that aid should be available as long as it puts the recipient in a better position to learn a vocation. The Committee also states that while the goal of the Act is still eventual employment, aid should not be withheld on the basis that the potential recipient may never be able to achieve employment.<sup>54</sup> Rather, assistance should be given even to those "individuals who may not, at the time of application appear to have a vocational goal . . . ."<sup>55</sup>

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49. See *supra* note 3.

50. See *supra* note 1. See also Cook, *supra* note 4, at 1480; Note, *Employment Discrimination Against the Handicapped and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act: An Essay on Legal Evasiveness*, 97 HARV. L. REV. 997, 997 (1984).

51. Report, *supra* note 1, at 26, reprinted in 1973 U.S. CODE CONG. & ADMIN. NEWS 2076, 2099.

52. *Id.* (emphasis added).

53. *Id.* at 18.

54. *Id.* at 21.

55. *Id.*

Finally, on March 22, 1988, Congress amended section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act by enacting the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 (Restoration Act).<sup>56</sup> The Restoration Act, which expanded and clarified the Rehabilitation Act's definition of "program or activity," was created "[t]o restore the broad scope of coverage and to clarify application of . . . section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act . . ."<sup>57</sup> Although the question of whether a correctional institution is a "program or activity" under the Rehabilitation Act is not at issue in *Bonner*, allowing Bonner to receive assistance under that Act dovetails with Congress' express purpose to broaden its scope and applicability.

This illustrates how the Rehabilitation Act should be viewed. By providing aid to more people earlier in the process, the Rehabilitation Act arguably retains vocational rehabilitation as a guideline but shifts the emphasis from cost effective vocational training to a humanitarian goal helping "a very needy portion of the population."<sup>58</sup>

Additional support for this proposition is based on the fact that the Rehabilitation Act was modeled after two civil rights statutes, Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964<sup>59</sup> and Title IX of the Education Amendments.<sup>60</sup> These statutes reflect an era of

56. Pub. L. No. 100-259, 102 Stat. 28 (1988)[hereinafter Restoration Act].

57. *Id.*

58. Report, *supra* note 2, at 12. See also Cook, *supra* note 4, at 1478 ("Ultimately, though, the legislation was justified in human and moral terms rather than strict economics.") (citing 119 CONG. REC. 7105 (1973)) ("I appeal to my colleagues to consider their vote on this bill not strictly on the basis of dollars and cents and cost effectiveness, although these items are important. But I appeal to you to look at the intent of this bill in terms of human values and life itself.") (Statement by Representative Hansen).

An important concern in the creation of this Act was the financial drain on society. See President Nixon's memorandum to Congress concerning the veto of S.7, Report, *supra* note 2, at 14-16, reprinted in 1973 U.S. CODE CONG. & ADMIN. NEWS 2076, 2088-2090. This concern arises whenever Congress seeks to provide welfare assistance. The purpose of this note is not to comment on the fiscal responsibility of passing this Act. Instead, this note attempts to determine whether the Ninth Circuit's interpretation of the Act can be supported.

59. See *infra* note 60.

60. Compare Education Amendments of 1972, § 901(a), 20 U.S.C. § 1681, § 1681(a) (1982) ("No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance . . .") (Title IX) and Civil Rights Act 1964, § 601, 42 U.S.C. § 1981, § 2000d (1982) ("No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.") (Title VI) with *supra* note 8. See also Note, *Closing the Courthouse Door on Section 503 Complainants*, Davis v. United Air Lines, Inc., 49 BROOKLYN L. REV. 1159, 1159 n.1 (1983) (citing 119 CONG. REC.

increased emphasis on protecting the civil rights of groups that traditionally have faced discrimination. By modeling the Rehabilitation Act after these two important statutes, Congress may have been focusing as much on the *result* of ending discrimination as it was on the *process* of providing vocational rehabilitation. A restrictive interpretation that provides services only when vocational rehabilitation will definitely occur is contrary to the spirit of these statutes.

The language and legislative history of the Rehabilitation Act illustrate that it is flexible enough to aid the handicapped in situations where vocational independence is not an immediately foreseeable benefit. *Bonner* presents such a situation. Assuming he meets the requirements necessary to qualify as a candidate for section 504's protection,<sup>61</sup> the Rehabilitation Act provides the means to help Bonner negate the effect of his handicaps. Even if his participation is not related directly to vocational rehabilitation, allowing Bonner to remain a prisoner of his own handicaps is contrary to the spirit of Rehabilitation Act.

## V. CONCLUSION

In *Bonner v. Lewis*, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals determined that section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires state prison facilities receiving federal aid to provide necessary services so that a prisoner is not discriminated against solely on the basis of his or her handicap. The court determined that the Rehabilitation Act is an appropriate tool to ensure that a prisoner's handicap does not preclude him or her from participating in remedial programs.

*Bonner* provides an important opportunity to determine congressional and societal motivation for aiding the handicapped. If that motivation is to help the handicapped achieve vocational independence so that *society* will benefit in return, the Rehabilitation Act cannot help Bonner. On the other hand,

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635 (1973)) ("Senator Humphrey of Minnesota, one of the sponsors of the 1973 Act, envisioned the Act as accomplishing for the handicapped what earlier civil rights legislation had accomplished for other minorities . . .").

61. *Bonner v. Lewis*, 857 F.2d 559, 562-63 (9th Cir. 1988), *on remand*, *Bonner v. Arizona Dep't of Corrections*, 714 F. Supp. 420 (D.C. Ariz. 1989) ("In order to prove a section 504 violation, Bonner must demonstrate: (1) that, as a deaf, blind and mute plaintiff, he is a handicapped person under the Rehabilitation Act; (2) that he is otherwise qualified; (3) that the relevant program receives financial assistance; and (4) that the defendants' refusal to provide qualified interpreter services impermissibly discriminates against him on the basis of his physical handicaps.")

if the motivation is a desire for society to help its less fortunate (with eventual vocational rehabilitation a constant goal rather than a prerequisite), the Rehabilitation Act is an appropriate tool to provide that assistance.

Although the court left important questions in its analysis unanswered, the court's holding is correct. The Rehabilitation Act has come to represent an important source of aid for the handicapped. This should be true even in those situations where the recipient's contribution to society is not immediately apparent.

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