



**Special Olympics**  
*Louisiana*

Dear Friend,

I invite you to be a fan of dignity and join me in a campaign to stop the use of the “R-word.” This week, the film "Tropic Thunder" opens in movie theaters across the nation. While intended to be a satire on Hollywood actors and producers, the film has a scene which is offensive and demeans people with intellectual disabilities.

The content of "Tropic Thunder" and the upcoming release of this film provide a platform for society to be made conscious of how hurtful the word “retard” can be – even if not directed at people with intellectual disabilities. DreamWorks did not seek input or counsel when creating the "Simple Jack" scene of the film. In one scene the word “retard” is mentioned 16 times. Studios will often seek counsel on sensitive topics from focus groups. For this movie, activist from other offended populations were consulted with, however, none of the disability groups were contacted. It was clear that the producers did not see an issue with the demeaning content of this scene.

According to the World Health Organization, approximately 3% of the world’s population has intellectual disabilities. Most of those people are functioning, contributing members to society who warrant the same respect that we afford our friends and neighbors. Intellectual Disabilities knows no borders - it is present in all countries, communities, races and social classes. The R-word has long been a harsh reminder of the ridicule and negative stigma directed toward people with intellectual disabilities. Yet the word is becoming increasingly popular in today’s culture. Although it is often not directed at a person with intellectual disability, it is used in a negative fashion, to demean or highlight someone’s lack of ability – a direct reflection on what people view as the capabilities of people with intellectual disabilities. It is not the word that we object to. It is the use of the word in today’s culture in a demeaning and negative way. As to free speech, we have successfully over the years been able to make it socially and politically incorrect to use other forms of hate speech. It is time to make the pejorative use of the R-word equally unacceptable. *Using the word "retard" to describe people with intellectual disabilities is hate speech.* The “R-word” campaign is an initiative being spearheaded by Special Olympics to eliminate the word “retard” from everyday language, as well as in film and music. We view the R-word as derogatory hate speech that further perpetuates negative stereotypes and dehumanizes people with intellectual disability.

I am asking you to help me in this campaign by boycotting the film "Tropic Thunder." It is never OK to laugh AT people – it is always OK to laugh WITH people. We aren’t laughing. In “Tropic Thunder” we just feel like people are making fun of us. If we can hurt the ticket sales of this film, we will have made a statement to Hollywood that we will not stand for this type of content that is hurtful to people with intellectual disabilities. **Be a fan of Dignity, don’t say the R-word.** Visit [www.R-word.org](http://www.R-word.org). To overcome ignorance and prejudice we must educate.

Sincerely,  
Special Olympics Louisiana Staff

*Click here to see an article written by Special Olympics Chairman, Timothy Shriver:*  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/08/10/AR2008081001869.html>

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