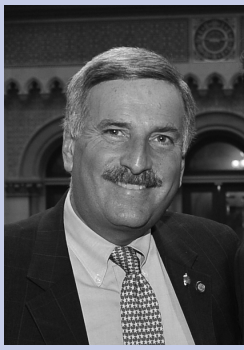


A Message from the Chair...



David I. Weprin
Chairperson

*NYS Assembly
Task Force on
People with
Disabilities*

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January 2016

Dear Friend,

Happy New Year! I hope this newsletter finds you happy and rested after a festive holiday season. The Legislature is now returning to Albany for a new session that I hope will be filled with victories for New Yorkers with Disabilities as there is much to be done in 2016. Last year, the Assembly budget added \$1 million to the independent living centers and \$500,000 to CUNY Leads. We also passed several initiatives that go a long way towards supporting our mission of integration, inclusion and independence for all people with disabilities. While we are thrilled with those legislative accomplishments, there is much more work that needs to be done, and I hope that we can partner with our colleagues in the Senate to address these important issues.

Also last year, the Task Force on People with Disabilities co-sponsored three public hearings and two roundtable discussions on issues important to New York's disability community. We thank everyone who attended and appreciate all of the input received. Currently, the Task Force is reviewing all testimonies and information received at each hearing and roundtable discussion.

The Task Force is ready to take all of the recommendations we receive, along with the many priority agendas that will be submitted to us, and develop our legislative agenda for 2016. We are fortunate to have so many dedicated advocates who work closely with us each year on our efforts.

I look forward to hearing from all of New York's disability advocates to determine the concerns that must be addressed in the coming year. As I've said before, advocates and people with disabilities are the best individuals to set our course. I am counting on all of you to develop a legislative and budgetary agenda that truly represents the needs of New Yorkers with disabilities. Please feel free to contact my Task Force office at 518-455-4592 with any thoughts, questions or concerns. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

David I. Weprin, Chair
New York State Assembly Task Force
on People with Disabilities



Assembly Member David Weprin with Joe Slaninka, Henry Viscardi School representative, and Michael Seereiter, winner of the annual "Dr. Henry Viscardi, Jr. Advocacy Award," on Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day.

For More Information

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Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day

The New York State Assembly Task Force on People with Disabilities and the Committee on Mental Health hosted the annual Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day (LDAD) on May 11, 2015 in Albany. The event was sponsored by Speaker Carl Heastie, Minority Leader Brian M. Kolb, Assembly Member David I. Weprin, Assembly Member Aileen Gunther and Assembly Member Steve Katz.

Michael Seereiter, President/CEO of the New York State Rehabilitation Association, was presented with the annual “Dr. Henry Viscardi, Jr. Advocacy Award,” which honors an individual each year who has dedicated him or herself to advocacy on behalf of people with disabilities. This award is given in the name of Dr. Henry Viscardi, Jr. because he was a legendary activist and supporter of disability rights.

As in prior years, nearly 50 organizations that serve the disability community displayed exhibits to provide information and demonstrate the services and opportunities that are available to people with disabilities. Also, two seminars on disability issues were held on the following topics:

- “Reducing the Stigma of Mental Illness through Public Awareness”
- “An Overview of the Employment First Commission”

2015 LDAD Legislation Agenda

As part of LDAD tradition, the Assembly passed a package of legislation aimed at making the lives of people with disabilities easier. Last year’s legislative package included:

Disability Rights

■ A.5388 (Lifton) – This bill would waive the state’s sovereign immunity with regard to application of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, and the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 as they apply to the protection of state employees.

■ A.1669-A (Wright) – This bill would require that the services of sign language interpreters be made available upon the request of a hearing impaired individual at public hearings and meetings. This bill would also establish provisions for assistive listening systems to be required in rooms used for public hearings that accommodate over 100 people after January 1, 2018.

■ A.136-A (Paulin) – This bill would make it a discriminatory practice under the Human Rights Law for a state or local government entity to refuse to remove architectural and structural communication barriers in existing facilities, and transportation barriers in existing vehicles and rail passenger cars used by an establishment for transporting individuals unless the removal would constitute an undue burden to the state or local government entity. In addition, this bill would clarify that state and local government entities are included within the definition of a “place of public accommodation, resort or amusement” in the Human Rights Law.

■ A.7188 (Glick) – This bill would provide an exemption to the Nurse Practice Act to establish a program for “advanced home health aides” who would be authorized to perform advanced tasks, including the administration of medications, under the direct supervision of a registered professional nurse.

Elections

■ A.2104-A (Weprin) – This bill will enable blind and visually impaired registered voters to request and receive Braille or large-print absentee ballots for elections administered under the election law and education law, providing them the opportunity to cast their vote independently.

Emergency Preparedness

■ A.5125-B (Cusick) – This bill would require counties and cities with a population of one million or more to establish comprehensive emergency management plans, which would include provisions for access of home health care and hospice personnel to patients during local emergencies.

■ A.2200 (Weprin) – This bill would require every high-rise building owner to establish and maintain an emergency evacuation plan for disabled occupants and visitors. Additionally, this bill would require the owners of such buildings to maintain and update the emergency evacuation plan for persons with disabilities as necessary and ensure that such plan is readily available to emergency personnel.

■ A.2658-A (Weprin) – This bill would aid localities in preparing for and responding to disasters by requiring counties to maintain a confidential registry of people of all ages with disabilities who may require evacuation assistance and shelter during a disaster. People would be provided with the option to be included in the registry.

Housing

■ A.4232 (Titus) – This bill would allow tenants with physically disabling conditions that affect their mobility a preference in occupying a vacant dwelling unit on a lower floor in the same project operated by the New York City Housing Authority.

Disabilities Awareness Day, *continued*

Social Services

■ A.3450 (Wright) – This bill would provide factors to be considered when the health care practitioner utilized by the local social services district examines either an applicant for or a recipient of public assistance with regards to a possible work limitation or exemption due to a disability; require such health care practitioner utilized by the local social services district to provide an explicit written determination and to present evidence when their diagnosis differs from that of the treating health care practitioner.



Transportation

■ A.5267 (Weprin) – This bill would create the MTA Riders' Council for People with Disabilities to study, investigate, monitor and make recommendations with respect to the accommodations of the needs and convenience for riders with disabilities. The bill would also add an additional non-voting member to the MTA Board appointed by the Governor upon the recommendation of the Council.

Veterans

■ A.4789 (Ramos) – This bill would establish the New York State Interagency Coordinating Council for Service-Disabled Veterans, define the powers and duties of the council and require an annual report.

Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie addresses the crowd at the Assembly's annual Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day in Albany on May 11, 2015 as interpreter Rachel Cahill relays his remarks.

Task Force Sponsors Hearings & Roundtables

The Task Force is currently analyzing feedback we have received from five events held last fall. One was a public hearing held on Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Treatment and Services on October 8th in Albany. Several TBI survivors, family members, advocates and service providers testified at this incredibly informative hearing and offered a tremendous amount of information that will be very useful as we develop our 2016 priority agenda. We look forward to continuing to work with all of the people affected by this issue as we move towards a new legislative session.

In addition, two roundtables were held on ridesharing companies such as Uber, Lyft, etc. - one on October 19th in New York City and one on October 21st in Albany. These events were incredibly timely to the Task Force because we have received several letters and phone calls regarding the lack of accessibility these companies are providing to people with disabilities. We were thrilled to participate in these roundtables because they allowed us to begin exploring options and suggestions as to how to handle this relatively new service. We are currently evaluating all that was discussed at these roundtables and furthering discussions made by disability advocates in the effort to ensure that the needs of people with disabilities do not go ignored by these new companies.

Furthermore, towards the end of 2015, we heard from a few very respected advocates who expressed a great need for improved transportation for people with disabilities – especially as it pertains to accessible taxis and livery vehicles. At that time they also conveyed their great concern with the increase

in popularity of ridesharing companies that are essentially refusing to provide services to people with disabilities. We are committed to working with people with disabilities and advocates to introduce new legislation that will address the need for more accessible taxis and livery vehicles and we look forward to pursuing the fair treatment of people with disabilities when it comes to ride sharing companies.

And finally, we co-sponsored two public hearings on the status of the State Office for the Aging's Office of Community Living study - one in New York City on October 20th and one on October 27th in Albany. We heard loud and clear from many disability advocates just how important it is for people with disabilities to have a statewide entity responsible for overseeing the rights and needs of people with disabilities - especially those with physical disabilities who have no specific state agency looking out for them. We look forward to addressing this need as we move into 2016.

Disabilities Awareness Day Poster Contest

For the last several years the Assembly has incorporated an elementary school poster contest as a component of LDAD. We sponsor this contest because educating today's children both about the challenges that people with disabilities face and the contributions they make to society will make tomorrow's leaders much less tolerant of discrimination. Eighteen students from Assembly Member Cusick's district received awards for their perceptive and creative entries into our annual elementary school poster contest.

First Place Winners

- Rocco Dembinski
Our Lady Queen of Peace, Kindergarten
- Alyssa Chirichella
St. Christopher, First Grade
- Sophia Marotta
P.S. 36, Second Grade
- Joseph Coppola
P.S. 3, Third Grade
- Allison Gallagher
Our Lady of Good Counsel, Fourth Grade
- Sarah Ann Pecoraro
P.S. 29, Fifth Grade

Second Place Winners

- Eva Taaffe
Our Lady Queen of Peace, Kindergarten
- Jenna Mannino
St. Christopher, First Grade
- Nicole Kindja
St. Christopher, Second Grade
- Ryann Parcell
Notre Dame Academy, Third Grade
- Sofia Reparto
P.S. 1, Fourth Grade
- Samadi Mayadunna
P.S. 29, Fifth Grade

Third Place Winners

- Julianna Taromina
Our Lady Queen of Peace, Kindergarten
- Alexis Gardella
St. Christopher, First Grade
- Marcello Squarciafico
P.S. 1, Second Grade
- Victoria D'Ovidio
St. Christopher, Third Grade
- Joseph DeZago
P.S. 55, Fourth Grade
- Emily Gotiangco
St. Christopher, Fifth Grade

We would like to thank everyone who participated in the 2015 Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day for making it such a great success and we look forward to seeing you at LDAD again this year.

It is easier to build strong children
than repair broken men.
– Frederick Douglass

News... *from the New York State Assembly Task Force on People with Disabilities*



David I. Weprin, Chair ■ Carl Heastie, Speaker



Assembly Members Michael Cusick, Joseph Borelli and David Weprin celebrate the accomplishments of poster contest winners (L-R): Samadi Mayadunna, Joseph DeZago, Marcello Squarciafico, Ryann Parcell, Nicole Kindja, Alexis Gardella and Rocco Dembinski.



Assembly Member David Weprin, Michael Seereiter, President/CEO of the New York State Rehabilitation Association, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, Assembly Member Michael Cusick and Kim Hill, Director of the Task Force on People with Disabilities, with poster contest winners. From left to right: Marcello Squarciafico, Rocco Dembinski, Ryann Parcell and Alexis Gardella

