



**Michael Miller**  
*Chairperson*

*NYS Assembly  
Task Force on  
People with  
Disabilities*

**Inside:**

*Page 2*

- **2013 Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day (LDAD)**

*Page 3*

- **2013 LDAD Continued**
- **2013 LDAD Photos**

*Page 4*

- **LDAD Poster Contest**
- **Public Hearing on Elections**

## A Message from the Chair...

Dear Friend,

Happy New Year! As many of you know, I am moving into my first full Legislative Session as Chair of the Task Force on People with Disabilities. I am very much looking forward to working with people with disabilities from across the state and all of New York's disability advocates as I determine the Task Force priorities for 2014. As always, our legislative agenda will start with the bills that the Assembly passed last year that focus on improving the lives and protecting the rights of people with disabilities. While the Assembly remains committed to those priorities, we, as disability advocates, must unite to convince the state Senate and the Governor that these initiatives should become law.

I am also eagerly awaiting any initiatives that are derived from the release of the Governor's comprehensive plan for serving New Yorkers with disabilities in the most integrated setting. In the few short months that I have been Chair of the Task Force, I have been made well aware of the fact that New Yorkers with disabilities have been waiting for an effective Olmstead plan for far too long. I am cautiously optimistic that this plan is a good step in the right direction, and I look forward to working with all of my colleagues in state government to help make this plan become reality.

Furthermore, as we do at the beginning of every legislative session, we have a great deal of work that must be done in regards to the state budget. Within weeks, we will be in the midst of budget proposals, talks and negotiations for the 2014-2015 budget. Please be assured that protecting Independent Living Center funding, home care, improving the stock of accessible and affordable housing, and other valuable programs and benefits will be top priorities of the Task Force. I will count on you to make your voices heard regarding budget requests and oppositions.

As always, I look forward to hearing from you, New York's disability advocates, to determine what other concerns need to be addressed. I truly believe, like so many of my predecessors, that the advocates and people with disabilities of this state are the best individuals to set our course. I look forward to visiting with those of you who I have already met, and I hope that those of you who I did not yet get a chance to meet will take the time to do so in the coming months. I am counting on you to develop a legislative and budget agenda that truly represents the needs of New Yorkers with disabilities. I hope to hear from you soon, so please feel free to contact my Task Force office at 518-455-4592 with any thoughts, questions or concerns. You can also e-mail me at millermg@assembly.state.ny.us. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Michael G. Miller, Chair  
New York State Assembly  
Task Force on People with Disabilities

### 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 June 3, 2013 in Albany. The event was sponsored by Speaker Sheldon Silver, Minority Leader Brian M. Kolb, Assembly Member Michael Miller, Assembly Member Aileen Gunther and Assembly Member Steve Katz.

Simeon Goldman, Senior Staff Attorney at Disability Rights New York (previously Disability Advocates, Inc.), 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:

- “The Transition to an Independent Protection & Advocacy Agency in New York”
- “Disasters, Hurricanes, Snow Storms, Floods – What We’ve Learned about Emergency Preparedness for People with Disabilities”

### 2013 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. This year’s legislative package included:

#### *Disability Rights*

■ A.828 (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.2070 (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.2826 (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, 2015.

■ A.5788 (Benedetto) – This bill would make it a discriminatory practice to deny access or discriminate against a person with a disability because they are accompanied by a dog that has been trained to perform tasks for their benefit. This bill would also make it a discriminatory practice for public housing entities to evict or to refuse occupancy to a person with a hearing impairment solely for owning a hearing dog.

■ A.6962 (Gunther) – This bill would establish an advocacy program for individuals with developmental disabilities who receive services through a managed care organization. The advocacy program would advise individuals of applicable rights and responsibilities; provide information, referrals and technical assistance; and pursue legal, administrative and other appropriate remedies to ensure the protection of the rights of the enrollees.

#### *Elections*

■ A.6195 (Cusick) – This bill would enable blind and visually impaired registered voters to request Braille or large-print absentee ballots for all elections administered under the election law and education law to be sent to their homes and allow such ballots to be used in certain election polling places until the new machines are fully phased in.

#### *Emergency Preparedness*

■ A.6445 (Cusick) – 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.

## Disabilities Awareness Day, *continued*

■ A.6432 (Cusick) – 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. Provisions are included in this bill that would provide people with the option to not be included in the registry.

### *Housing*

■ A.1742 (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.

### *Transportation*

■ A.945 (Kellner) – 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.6213 (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 be submitted to the legislature.



*Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver addresses the crowd gathered at the New York State Assembly Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day on June 3, 2013, in Albany.*

*Assembly Member Michael Miller introduces himself as new Chair of the Task Force on People with Disabilities at Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day.*



*Simeon Goldman, Senior Staff Attorney at Disability Rights New York, accepts the Dr. Henry Viscardi, Jr. Advocacy Award presented to him on Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day.*

*Assembly Member Michael Cusick and Assembly Member Michael Miller celebrate the accomplishments of all of the poster contest winners at Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day in Albany on June 3, 2013.*





## 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.

Sixteen 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

- Nicole Mormile  
*Our Lady Queen of Peace, Kindergarten*
- Gavin Clampet  
*P.S. 1, 1st Grade*
- Joseph DeZago  
*P.S. 55, 2nd Grade*
- Keily Lopez  
*SI School of Civic Leadership, 3rd Grade*
- Madeline Salinardi  
*P.S. 42, 4th Grade*
- Christena Armento  
*Holy Rosary, 5th Grade*

### Second Place Winners

- Robert Dahling  
*Our Lady Queen of Peace, Kindergarten*
- Peter Dembinski  
*Our Lady Queen of Peace, 1st Grade*
- Joseph Torrellas  
*Our Lady Queen of Peace, 2nd Grade*
- Ryan Hayes  
*Our Lady of Good Counsel, 3rd Grade*
- Nicholas Bowen  
*P.S. 42, 4th Grade*
- Kayla McBratney  
*Our Lady of Good Counsel, 5th Grade*

### Third Place Winners

- Christopher Gullo  
*Our Lady Queen of Peace, Kindergarten*
- Kayla Marzullo  
*Our Lady Queen of Peace, 1st Grade*
- Aaliyah Navarrete  
*P.S. 19, 2nd Grade*
- Gary Van Pelt  
*Our Lady of Good Counsel, 3rd Grade*
- Teagan Ka  
*Gateway Academy, 4th Grade*
- Victoria Hannah  
*P.S. 1, 5th Grade*

We would like to thank everyone who participated in the 2013 Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day for making it such a great success, and we look forward to seeing you at LDAD again next year.

## News... *from the New York*



### *State Assembly Task Force on People with Disabilities*

Michael G. Miller, Chair ■ Sheldon Silver, Speaker

## Assembly Hearing Held to Make Voting More Accessible for all New Yorkers

On December 9, 2013, the Assembly Standing Committee on Election Law and the Subcommittee on Election Day Operations and Voter Disenfranchisement held a public hearing to examine solutions to make voting, in person and absentee, more accessible for all voters, and examine moving the state primary to June, beginning in 2014.

Among other things, the Committee took testimony relating to the range of issues associated with enhancing accessibility to the

polls as well as increasing fairness to voters and the effects of such proposals on the State budget.

Several testimonies were either presented or submitted, and one of the main areas of concern was the ability for local elections to continue to use the lever-style voting machine. Obviously, New York's disability advocates oppose any further use of these machines as they are not able to be used by many people with disabilities. The Task Force will be poring over each and every testimony in our effort to resolve this issue once and for all.