

A Message from the Chair...

January 2018



James Skoufis
Chairperson

*NYS Assembly
Task Force on
People with
Disabilities*

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Happy New Year! My name is James Skoufis and I am the new Chair of the Assembly Task Force on People with Disabilities. I was very recently appointed to this position following Assemblymember Didi Barrett's move to chair the Committee on Libraries. I'd like to offer my sincere appreciation to Assemblymember Barrett and her staff for all of their hard work on the issues affecting people with disabilities and for making this transition seamless. I am extremely honored to have been offered this position – it is one that I take very seriously. I have already begun reaching out to and meeting with key disability advocates to learn about the problems affecting New Yorkers with disabilities so that together we can pursue solutions.

While new to this chairmanship, I am very quickly learning the priorities of New York's disability community. Accessible housing, personal care attendant wages, employment for people with disabilities and several other issues will be at the forefront in the 2018 legislative session. I anxiously await taking on these challenges alongside you.

One of the items that I have repeatedly heard is that identifying accessible, affordable housing remains a challenge for people with disabilities who want to live independently in the community. Unfortunately, Assemblymember Lavine's bill, A.5950-A, was recently vetoed, which would have helped people with disabilities to remain in their own homes and out of nursing and adult homes. This bill seeks to create a tax credit of up to \$2,750 for people with disabilities to renovate or modify their existing homes to make them more accessible; it would also be available to people adding accessibility features to new construction. Additionally, the Access to Home program is not as robust as it once was, further limiting the available resources to individuals with disabilities who would like to remain in the community.

Another vital resource for individuals with disabilities remaining in their homes is the services of personal care attendants. These hardworking individuals provide crucial support to people with disabilities and deserve to be paid a wage that reflects the importance of their work. You can be sure I will fight throughout this year's legislative session to do everything I can to increase necessary resources for people who wish to independently remain in their community.

You'll find that I approach my work in a very hands-on manner which is why I look forward to meeting many of you in the coming months. As always, if you have any questions, comments or concerns, please reach out to our Task Force office at 518-455-4592.

Sincerely,

James Skoufis, Chair
New York State Assembly Task Force
on People with Disabilities



Assembly Member Didi Barrett presents Glenn Liebman, CEO of the Mental Health Association of New York State, with the annual "Dr. Henry Viscardi, Jr. Advocacy Award" at the Assembly's annual Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day in Albany on May 22, 2017. Joe Slaninka from the Viscardi School was on hand to celebrate.

For More Information

New York State Assembly Task Force on People with Disabilities
Kimberly T. Hill, Director

Room 203 Legislative Office Building
Albany, New York 12248

Phone: (518) 455-4592
Fax: (518) 455-7099

hillk@nyassembly.gov

Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day



Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie addresses the crowd at the Assembly's annual Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day in Albany on May 22, 2017.

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 Monday, May 22, 2017 in Albany. The event was sponsored by Speaker Carl Heastie, Minority Leader Brian M. Kolb, Assembly Member Didi Barrett, Assembly Member Aileen Gunther and Assembly Member Melissa Miller.

Glenn Liebman, CEO of the Mental Health Association of New York State, 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:

- "Establishing the New York State ABLE Program – A NY ABLE Program Preview: Program Status, Features and Upcoming Availability"
- "Employment First: Resources for Employers and Employees in 2017 and Beyond"

2017 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.2546 (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.7283 (Dilan) – This bill would clarify that reasonable accommodation to enable a person with a disability to use and enjoy a dwelling includes the use of an animal to alleviate the symptoms or effects of a disability.



Celebrating the 2017 Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day in Albany, from left to right: Oliver Miller, Assembly Member Michael Cusick, Assembly Member Melissa Miller, Assembly Member Patricia Fahy, Assembly Member Didi Barrett, Glenn Liebman, Assembly Member David Weprin, Assembly Member Jo Anne Simon and Assembly Member Aileen Gunther.

Disabilities Awareness Day, *continued*

Elections

■ A.4961-B (Weprin) – This bill would 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.6287 (Barrett) – 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.6865 (Weprin) – This bill would aid localities in preparing for and responding to disasters by requiring counties with local emergency management plans 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.4818 (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. (signed, Chapter 484)

Veterans

■ A.5931 (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.

Trusts

■ A.6743 (Barrett) – This bill would exclude a special needs trust, established by an individual with disabilities, from the medical assistance eligibility determination for such individual. (signed, Chapter 187)

■ A.5175-A (Gottfried) – This bill would require the Department of Health to include information with the eligibility notice to individuals who qualify for the excess income program of the option to participate in a qualifying trust as a means of qualifying for medical assistance. (signed, Chapter 475)

Tax Credits

■ A.5333 (Weprin) – This bill would provide an incentive for owners of residential buildings to retrofit homes for access for people with disabilities.

■ A.5950-A (Lavine) – This bill would allow a tax credit for either new or retrofitted principal residences which are universally designed to be accessible and adaptable housing. (vetoed, Message 158)

New York State's Achieving A Better Life Experience (ABLE) Program

During the 2017 Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day, we held a seminar to provide a preview of the brand new ABLE program, which was created to allow people with disabilities to save for qualified disability expenses without taking the risk of losing important assistance program benefits such as SSI and Medicaid. These funds are meant to supplement benefits provided through Medicaid, SSI and other sources. Also, ABLE account earnings are tax exempt as long as they're used to pay for qualified disability expenses.

If you are interested in learning more about this helpful new program, please go to www.mynable.org or call 1-855-569-2253 Monday through Friday, 8:00 am to 8:00 pm.



Anne Del Plato, Director of the 529 Programs, explains the NY ABLE Program to Disabilities Awareness Day attendees.

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:

- Fatima Marcial
St. Christopher's, Kindergarten
- Lauren Urbanec
P.S. 54, First Grade
- Evia Lika
Notre Dame Academy, Second Grade
- Emmanuel Nicanor
P.S. 54, Third Grade
- Aarelyn Eustaquio
P.S. 54, Fourth Grade
- Coral Virginia
P.S. 56, Fifth Grade

Second Place Winners:

- Marissa Cera
St. Christopher's, Kindergarten
- Mia O'Donnell
Notre Dame Academy, First Grade
- Anna Mugge
P.S. 54, Second Grade
- Ava Palermo
P.S. 54, Third Grade
- Paciencia Tharindi Gunawardhane
P.S. 54, Fourth Grade
- Daniella Ciaburri
P.S. 54, Fifth Grade

Third Place Winners:

- Samuel Vardanian
St. Christopher's, Kindergarten
- Marin Caldarella
Notre Dame Academy, First Grade
- Sophia Hiler
Notre Dame Academy, Second Grade
- Lillian Martinez
P.S. 54, Third Grade
- Hernan Cortes
P.S. 54, Fourth Grade
- Thomas Squires
P.S. 54, Fifth Grade

We would like to thank everyone who participated in the 2017 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

New York State Assembly, Albany, New York 12248

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



James Skoufis, Chair ■ Carl Heastie, Speaker



Assembly Member Michael Cusick celebrates the accomplishments of poster contest winners, front row (L-R): Anna Mugge, Mia O'Donnell, Lauren Urbanec, Evia Lika, Coral Virginia, Ava Palermo, Lillian Martinez. Second Row (L-R): Daniella Ciaburri, Emmanuel Nicanor, Thomas Squires and Aarelyn Eustaquio.