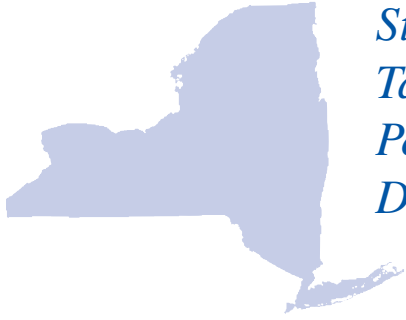


News... *from the New York*

State Assembly Task Force on People with Disabilities



Michael J. Cusick, Chair ■ Sheldon Silver, Speaker



**Michael
Cusick**
Chairperson

*NYS Assembly
Task Force on
People with
Disabilities*

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A Message from the Chair...

January 2013

Dear Friend,

Happy New Year! I hope you enjoyed a very happy, healthy and joyous holiday season. As a new year begins, I always find myself reflecting on the past year's accomplishments while at the same time looking forward to what the new year might have in store. As Chair of the Assembly Task Force on People with Disabilities, I am happy to report that many of the bills that were part of our priority agenda did again pass the Assembly. In fact, one was recently signed into law by the Governor (see pages two and three for more information). However, I find myself frustrated by the lack of movement of many of these bills in the Senate. If we can't convince the Senate to pass these bills we will never have the opportunity to send them to the Governor for his consideration. Therefore, as we move through 2013, I urge you to join forces with all of New York's disability advocates and urge the Senate to pass the bills that have been languishing in the Assembly for years.

I can say with certainty that two of the pieces of legislation that I will be advocating for are my emergency preparedness bills. Hurricane Sandy (and Irene) has definitely taught us that New York State is not prepared to appropriately assist people with disabilities in the event of a disaster. Please be assured that I am doing everything in my capacity as Chair of the Task Force to address this.

Also, while I have this chance I would like to express my concern over the fact that the life of lever voting machines was extended for certain elections for two more years in New York State. When A.9178-A passed the Assembly on June 20th, I was only one of a few legislators who voted no on this bill, which is alarming to me for a few reasons. First of all, it indicates that many elected representatives might not be aware of how inaccessible these machines are to people with disabilities and second, it demonstrated that we as an advocacy community were not able to communicate our message to many people in a very short amount of time.

As always, as we move towards a new legislative session (and budget season), we welcome all of your thoughts, suggestions and support. In fact, we are currently in the process of creating our 2013 priority agenda, so now is the time to chime in. We appreciate all of your continued support, comments and feedback, 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 cusickm@assembly.state.ny.us. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Cusick, Chair
New York State Assembly
Task Force on People with Disabilities

Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day

The New York State Assembly Task Force on People with Disabilities and the Committee on Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities hosted the annual Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day (LDAD) on May 21, 2012 in Albany. The event was sponsored by Speaker Sheldon Silver, Minority Leader Brian M. Kolb, Assembly Member Michael J. Cusick, Assembly Member Felix Ortiz and Assembly Member Steve Katz.

Clifton Perez, Systems Advocate at the Independent Living Center of the Hudson Valley, 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:

- Transportation Accessibility in New York State
- Medicaid Reform in New York State

2012 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.9848-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.1932 (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, 2014. (This bill passed earlier in the year in anticipation of Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day.)

■ A.3689 (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.

Elections

■ A.5337-B (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 to be sent to their homes.

Emergency Preparedness

■ A.6658 (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.

■ A.7257 (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.3420-A (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*

Transportation

■ A.745 (Kellner) – The bill would establish the Metropolitan Transportation Authority Riders’ Council for People with Disabilities to study and investigate all aspects of the day-to-day operations of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and its subsidiaries, monitor its performance, and make recommendations to improve its operations with respect to people with disabilities.

■ A.3363 (Lavine) – This bill would require that both handicapped accessible parking spaces and their access aisles be at least eight feet wide to ensure that they are wide enough for people with disabilities to enter and exit their vehicles, particularly for those whose wheelchair ramps open on the side of the vehicle. **(This bill has been signed into law by the Governor, Chapter 274 of the laws of 2012)**

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

- Emilia Deliso
Academy of St. Dorothy - Kindergarten
- Kayla Melidones
Academy of St. Dorothy - 1st Grade
- Gary Van Pelt
Our Lady of Good Counsel - 2nd Grade
- Jasin Marku
P.S. 5 - 3rd Grade
- Caitlin Matthies
P.S. 8 - 4th Grade
- Kayla Nazi
P.S. 8 - 5th Grade

Second Place Winners

- Christopher Canale
St. Christopher’s School - Kindergarten
- Isabella Odjourian
Academy of St. Dorothy - 1st Grade
- Caroline Crowdell
Our Lady of Good Counsel - 2nd Grade
- Matthew Casey
Academy of St. Dorothy - 3rd Grade
- Lyndsay Lampariello
P.S. 8 - 4th Grade
- Nicholas Orsini
P.S. 8 - 5th Grade

Third Place Winners

- Colin Chu
Academy of St. Dorothy - Kindergarten
- Ryan Cambria
St. Christopher’s School - 1st Grade
- Andrew Barbera
Our Lady of Good Counsel - 2nd Grade
- Joseph Noto
P.S. 5 - 3rd Grade
- Jianna Cruz
P.S. 8 - 4th Grade
- Jenna Bonomi
P.S. 42 - 5th Grade

We would like to thank everyone who participated in the 2012 Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day for making it such a great success and we look forward to seeing you at LDAD again this year.



Assembly Member Michael Cusick celebrates the accomplishments of poster contest winners (1st row L-R) Colin Chu, Emilia Deliso, Kayla Melidones, Isabella Odjourian, Jianna Cruz, Christopher Canale, Gary Van Pelt, Caroline Crowdell (2nd row L-R) Andrew Barbera, Ryan Cambria, Joseph Noto, Kayla Nazi, Assemblyman Cusick, Nicholas Orsini, Jenna Bonomi.

Task Force Outraged at Situations People with Disabilities Experienced During Hurricane Sandy

The Task Force would like to take this opportunity to express our condolences, concern, and in some instances, outrage, for everyone who was affected by Hurricane Sandy. Obviously, Sandy was a storm that will go down in the record books – especially for those who lost property, or worse, their loved ones. The heartbreaking stories that we've heard over the last few months will stay with us long after we've cleaned up from this mess.

However, the situations we've heard about that people with disabilities were forced to face, many of which could and should have been rectified after Hurricane Irene, simply need to be addressed. It's absurd that a population which already deals with too many daily challenges should be dealing with poor communication about evacuation procedures, inaccessible evacuation shelters, lengthy loss of power (putting life dependent equipment in jeopardy), the inability to get caregivers, dialysis centers closed and addiction centers closed, just to name a few.

For that reason, the Task Force on People with Disabilities applauds Governor Cuomo's recent appointments made to commissions to improve New York's emergency preparedness and response capabilities and strengthen the state's infrastructure to withstand natural disasters. Obviously, the current mechanisms in place are inadequate and need to be addressed as soon as possible. We are eager to work closely with both state and local leaders to do just that.

In fact, the Assembly already recognizes the importance of this issue. That's why we passed two emergency preparedness bills (see page two) as part of our Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day package last year. Please be assured that we will continue working on this legislation and that we are committed to significantly improving the systems currently in place to aid people with disabilities when disasters arise.

2012 LDAD Photos



Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver addresses the crowd gathered at the New York State Assembly Legislative Disabilities Awareness Day on May 21, 2012 in Albany.

Assembly Member Cusick presents Clifton Perez, Systems Advocate at the Independent Living Center of the Hudson Valley, with the annual "Dr. Henry Viscardi, Jr. Advocacy Award."



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