



NEW YORK TO BRING NEWS SERVICE TO VISUALLY IMPAIRED CONSUMERS

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE NEW YORK STATE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR - Maritere Arce

Lieutenant Governor David A. Paterson and New York State Consumer Protection Board (CPB) Chairperson and Executive Director Mindy Bockstein announced today that the CPB is the first State Agency to work together with the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) of New York State to provide consumer alerts, notices and newsletters to individuals who are blind or visually impaired via the NFB's NEWSLINE(r) service.

NFB-NEWSLINE(r) enables adults and children who are blind or print-impaired to read newspapers, magazines, notices of public interest, government announcements and other materials of interest at any time and from anywhere. Text-to-speech technology developed by the National Federation of the Blind, has changed the way people with visual impairments can access reading material. The only technology required is a standard touch-tone telephone.

"I am pleased that the Consumer Protection Board has taken the initiative to make the critical information that they produce available to the blind and visually impaired," Lieutenant Governor Paterson said. "Our goal is for this groundbreaking program to lead to even greater access to government for blind and print-impaired individuals."

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New York State HAVA Update

Helen Benlisa
Project HAVA Coordinator

On December 20, 2007, U.S. District Court Judge Gary Sharpe ordered New York State to install ballot marking devices (BMD) in every polling site in the State by the September Primary in 2008 and gave the New York State Board of Elections (NYSBOE) just 15 days to submit another plan to the Court outlining its plans for replacement of lever machines in 2009. If this latest plan is not completed to Judge Sharpe's satisfaction, the Court will then appoint a Special Master to oversee HAVA implementation in New York State. Judge Sharpe minced no words in communicating his "disgust with the state for its failure" to achieve HAVA compliance and reminded State election officials he could hold them in contempt and could have them jailed, should he so choose.

Election Commissioners around the State had voiced their concerns about just such a compressed timeline for HAVA compliance to the Court via an Amicus Curiae Brief. In it they cited the numerous challenges in staffing, training, and development of procedures relating to voting systems. However, the message of the Court was clear: New York State has failed voters with disabilities far too long. New York must become HAVA-compliant, no exceptions, no excuses. We applaud Judge Sharpe's commitment to ensuring voter access in 2008. It is long overdue.

Not wanting to face jail time, the State Board members hammered out a more detailed plan and an updated timeline for HAVA implementation was created. On January 24, 2008, the NYSBOE held a meeting to announce the short list of BMDs the counties could then choose from. Three machines made the list: Sequoia ImageCast, ES&S Automark, and Premier Automark. The Sequoia was a unanimous choice; the ES&S and Premier were accepted providing they make some changes. A fourth machine, from machine vendor Liberty, was under consideration but then was struck from the list. Liberty was angered by this ruling and stated its plan to sue the NYSBOE. The following week, the NYSBOE announced a new ruling that removed ES&S and Premier from the list leaving the Sequoia ImageCast as the only possible machine choice. ES&S and Premier filed suit as well and the court ruled they and Liberty should be allowed back on the list. But in the mean time, many counties made their choice based on the single option of Sequoia. As it stands now, 50 counties have chosen the Sequoia ImageCast, the remaining counties are split between the other machines.

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Mindy Bockstein, Chairperson and Executive Director of the CPB said: "This revolutionary technology is opening doors and providing reading materials to adults and children who could never before access them. The CPB is dedicated to protecting all New Yorkers. This population will now be able to have the information they need about important issues like identity and credit card theft, recalls, consumer credit issues and more. With this technology, visually impaired New Yorkers can do something as simple as access the newspaper or work independently on school projects. We are grateful to the NFB for providing this critical service."

Through the use of the telephone, a subscriber to NFBNEWSLINE(r) can access more than 250 daily newspapers, including the Albany Times Union, the Buffalo News, the Long Island Newsday and the New York Times, a growing number of magazines and now for the first time, timely and important notices from government agencies.

Carl Jacobsen, President of the National Federation of the Blind of New York State, said: "I am pleased that the Spitzer/Paterson Administration has reached out to the blind community to partner in this venture. For the first time, we can get the same notices as our neighbors and not have to wait for second-hand information. I applaud the Administration, especially the CPB, for yet another effort to make government more accessible and participatory by all of its citizens."

The NFB-NEWSLINE(r) service is totally free to anyone who is unable to access standard print. The estimate is that there are more than 310,000 persons in New York State who would be eligible for this free service. This includes people who have not been diagnosed as legally blind, but who have difficulty reading printed information. The NFB-NEWSLINE(r) system is simple and user friendly and there are tutorials and training available.

Persons interested in obtaining this service for their own use or for a family member should contact the National Federation of the Blind of New York State at 718-567-7821 or by e-mail at Newsline@nfbny.org, or access the CPB website at www.nysconsumer.gov for information.

www.myindependentliving.org/news.htm

Our Newsletter on Tape/E-Mail

Would you like to receive our newsletter on tape or via email? There is no charge for either service, though it is helpful if those who are receiving the tapes return them if they are just planning to throw them away.

Please contact the Center at 607-432-8000, or you can e-mail us at ccfi@ccfi.us if you would be interested in this service.

What's a WIPA?

Laurene Reichardt, Disability Programs Manager

WIPA is "Work Incentives Planning and Assistance"! It is a service offered by the Catskill Center for Independence to assist people with disabilities who are working or seeking work, and who also receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or both.

People who receive these benefits need to know that employment will impact their benefits!

The Catskill Center, in cooperation with the Social Security Administration, offers WIPA services to people in Delaware, Chenango, Broome, Tioga, Sullivan and Chemung Counties. For those in Otsego County and other counties not mentioned here, contact the Center for information on accessing WIPA services in those areas.

Understanding Social Security benefits and managing them properly while being employed can be a daunting task. Letters from Social Security can be frightening at the least, especially when it says there has been an overpayment of benefits and Social Security wants the money back. Let us help you prevent this from happening.

People who receive benefits often express a fear of losing benefits and/or medical coverage if they go to work, even if getting a job will actually bring more money into the household. And because it takes time to work one's way off of benefits, WIPA services can help put together a Work Incentives Plan (WIP) that will make the process a less stressful one.

There are "work incentives" that can assist people in safely and steadily working towards benefits independence: there are some for just SSI recipients, some for just SSDI beneficiaries, some for both. There are several ways to keep Medicaid and/or Medicare long after a person has worked their way off of the benefits rolls entirely. Work incentives are available for students as well.

The process of seeking and obtaining employment can be a scary time for people who receive benefits. Let the Catskill Center for Independence help you to get past those fears and reach a successful employment goal!

For more information, call the WIPA hotline at 866-724-8666, or send an e-mail to wipainfo@ccfi.us. Or contact us through the Center's website at www.ccfi.us/wipa.html. Information is also available from the Social Security website at www.ssa.gov.

The Catskill Center for Independence launches the inaugural issue of "The Legislative Lookout,"

The Catskill Center for Independence launched the inaugural issue of "The Legislative Lookout." The newsletter is designed to introduce readers to the Statewide Systems Advocacy Network (SSAN) and the work of the Network that is designed to remove barriers people with disabilities face through the legislative process.

Think about this: advocacy is something all of us do every day. Sometimes the issues are national, sometimes they are personal, but they are always important because they are our issues. It is when our voices are in concert that we speak the loudest and are heard. Due to the involvement of dedicated individuals we continue to reach out to and assist persons with disabilities, enabling them to live more independent, productive and rewarding lives. Most importantly, participation in our "action group" will ensure that no one will be working alone. Working together, we CAN and DO make a difference!

As an SSAN volunteer you contribute to your community, perhaps help someone in your family, and even improve your own quality of life.

Don't delay; join today!
You'll be glad you did!

To learn more about how you can become involved in this exciting process or to receive "The Legislative Lookout" contact:

Charles Reichardt, Systems Advocate
607.432.8000 or ccfi@ccfi.us

The following is a brief listing of some of the informational materials available at the Center.

All material is available in alternative format upon request.

Transitional Services Directory
(For Delaware, Otsego, Schoharie Counties)

How-to Start a Support Group Guide

A Guide to Disability Rights Laws from the U.S. Department of Justice

All materials are free of charge.

Don't forget to check us out on-line at:

<http://www.ccfi.us>

A special "THANK YOU!" to David Bame, owner of "Equip to Care", a Bainbridge based company that sells durable medical equipment. Thank you David for your generous donation of five brand new wheelchairs for the Center's lending closet. Please consider "Equip to Care" when making your next equipment purchase!



Don Wyckoff, CCFI's Lending Closet Manager thanks David Bame for his generous donation.

**To Contact David at Equip to Care
call 607-967-5922**

Lending Closets

The *Catskill Center for Independence* is one of several area agencies to maintain a "lending closet." Among the items to lend are wheelchairs, walkers, canes, crutches, etc. A small list of other participating agencies with a point of contact follows:

Delaware County Public Health Nursing - Marcia Bagley,
607-746-8282

Delaware Regional Center
607-865-6551

Hamilton's Farm - Penny Hamilton
607-746-2057

Computer Classes

If you are interested in learning a little something about using computers or surfing the "Net", please call Ed at the Center to sign-up. Spaces and times are limited, so don't hesitate to call us at 607-432-8000, or email us at ccfi@ccfi.us

Online Support Groups

Below are only a few of the support groups that we are hosting. To view the entire listing, visit us online at www.ccfi.us.

Parents of Students with Disabilities / Assistive Technology / Housing / Election Reform / Health Care Reform / Transportation

If you are interested, please contact *Ed Lynch* at the Center, 607-432-8000, or you can email him at ccfi@ccfi.us for more information!

Calendar of Events

Video Day

On the last Wednesday of each month, at 2:00 pm, we will be showing a video for anyone who is interested. All videos will deal with some aspect of a disability-related issue and discussions will follow each video.

Space is limited. Please contact us to reserve your space by the close of business the Monday prior to each video showing.

April 30, 2008

Videos for Business: Two videos to assist businesses & employers with understanding the facts about hiring people with disabilities. No Barriers for Business: This video explores how businesses can become "disability -friendly," and Ten Small Business Excuses: Information on the Americans with Disabilities Act and how small businesses need to comply.

May 28, 2008

A Video Guide to (Dis)Ability Awareness: We learn by living and working together. This video provides a fresh point of view – looking at disabilities from many new perspectives – through the lives of people who have disabilities themselves. Recommended for raising everyone's awareness of disability issues.

For Sale:

Merits 4 wheel power chair--like new--comes with Battery Charger and manuals--the seat detaches and folds for easier transport and the batteries are like new. Originally \$4200.00, asking \$2500 firm. Please call Robert Sandike at 607-638-9575.

The Center does not endorse the information contained in this advertisement as to its accuracy.

A New Face at the Center

Hello everyone! My name is Theresa Wiedeck and as of September 4th, 2007 I am the Inclusive Education Specialist here at the Catskill Center for Independence. I have already started teaching the Work Readiness Course as part of the Chenango Delaware Otsego (CDO) Out of School Youth Program, and I love it! We focus on verbal communication skills, basic reading and writing in the workplace, mathematics in business, creative thinking and problem solving, following directions and instructions, personal skills, and navigating the computer.

I am also getting my feet wet in the VESID Fast Track program with my co-worker Jade Pendolf. I really enjoy doing this because it gives me a chance to go into the schools and meet the students and discuss their employment dreams for the future.

I have also become active in the Delaware County Disabilities Council, CDO Workforce Youth Council, Transition Work Group, and NYAIL's Public Policy Committee on Inclusive Education. I also facilitate monthly meetings with the YES (Young Employable Students) Program.

I am from the area and earned my Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education from SUNY- Cortland. I have a wide variety of experiences that include teaching, childcare, home visiting, and am currently providing respite services part time through Springbrook. I am also in the process of obtaining my family development credentials. I enjoy spending my free time with my friends, family, and three dogs (Layla, Angie, and Marley). I'm excited to be here at the Center and I look forward to continue to work with the community.

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Disability groups are concerned because the Sequoia ImageCast was a very recent addition to the NYSBOE's list of voting systems and got pushed through the certification process rather quickly. If there were demonstrations or testing events for this machine, they were not well known and many people did not know of the ImageCast's existence until it was announced as a BMD option for the state. The very people these machines are meant to benefit had virtually no input in this latest decision-making process.

Once the machine choices were announced, the counties then had two weeks to make their decision. Between the time pressure and the confusion about the machine vendor lawsuits, and the features the ImageCast offers, such as the built-in scanner, it is easy to see why it was the popular choice for the counties. However, it may not be the most preferred choice of the disability community.

So, on Primary and Election Day 2008, we will still have lever machines along with BMDs. In 2009, lever machines will no longer be used and we will most likely be filling in a paper ballot, using either a BMD or a pencil, and inserting it into a scanner. And as long as all of our polling sites are physically accessible and the poll workers are well trained, courteous, inclusive and conscientious, we will finally ALL HAVA Vote!

To view news articles, legal documents and all things HAVA visit our website www.ccfi.us - you won't be disappointed!

Barrier Free Voting Poster Available

The Northeast ADA&IT Center is providing, free of charge, voting posters to people in their region (NY, NJ, PR and the USVI). If you are outside of this region, please visit www.adata.org to contact your closest ADA Center to check on their availability of this poster.

For more information or to make a request by phone, please feel free to contact Northeast ADA & IT Center at 800-949-4232 (NY, NJ, PR, and USVI). These posters are available on a first come, first serve basis.

Please call your county Board of Elections office to find which accessible machine is being used by your county, where and when demonstration events will be held, and other pertinent information. Their numbers are listed below.

The Otsego County Board of Elections
607-547-4247 or 607-547-4325
140 Co Hwy 33W
Cooperstown

The Delaware County Board of Elections
607-746-2315
3 Gallant Avenue
Delhi

The Schoharie County Board of Elections
518-295-8326
County Office Building, Room 300
284 Main Street
Schoharie

The Chenango County Board of Elections
607-337-1760
The Chenango County Office Building, Lower Level
5 Court St.
Norwich