

The Legislative Lookout

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Published and distributed by the Catskill Center for Independence, "The Legislative Lookout" is a newsletter devoted to improving the quality of life for individuals with disabilities by taking action to achieve a barrier free, fully inclusive society.

The vehicle used to accomplish this goal is the Statewide Systems Advocacy Network (SSAN). This newsletter is designed to keep you informed about the goals, actions and accomplishments of the SSAN. It also provides ideas and avenues for interested citizens to get involved.

A Message From Your Systems Advocate

Welcome to the inaugural issue of "The Legislative Lookout," where an invitation is extended to anyone interested in becoming involved in the Statewide Systems Advocacy Network (SSAN). This newsletter is designed to introduce readers to the numerous barriers confronting persons with disabilities and point out the variety of ways people can participate to bring about positive change in their community.



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 contact:

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

**Energy and persistence
conquer all things.**

Benjamin Franklin 1706 – 1790

What is the Statewide Systems Advocacy Network?

The Statewide Systems Advocacy Network (SSAN) is a grassroots advocacy network operated by centers for independent living across New York State. The New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL) oversees and coordinates the network. The Catskill Center for Independence is part of this statewide network consisting of hundreds of individuals across New York all working together to improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities through the achievement of a barrier free, fully inclusive society

Each year disability advocates, independent living center staff and NYAIL representatives gather at a "Disability Caucus" to discuss barriers that individuals with disabilities continue to face as well as the accomplishments of the SSAN over the previous year. The ultimate goal of the caucus is to develop a Disability Priority Agenda that details the legislative priorities the network will focus upon in the upcoming year. This roadmap serves to guide the network in its advocacy efforts over the ensuing months. A summary of the current Disability Priority Agenda can be found on page 5.

The SSAN employs a variety of strategies and methods in its efforts to achieve the goals outlined in the Disability Priority Agenda. Volunteers across the state stand "at the ready" to mobilize into action when called upon. This mobilization typically starts with an "action alert". An action alert is akin to a "call to arms" and is issued by the NYAIL Advocacy Coordinator whenever action is required to further the goals of the Disability Priority Agenda.

Action alerts are issued electronically, through email, to the Systems Advocates employed by various independent living centers throughout the state. The Systems Advocates are then responsible for contacting the volunteers they work with locally to inform them of the action alert and assist them in completing the tasks required in the alert. In some cases action is required in support of an issue, regulation, or legislation, and in other cases action is required to oppose it. Either way, the action alert can require volunteers to respond in a variety of ways such as:

- Contacting legislators by phone fax and/or email
- Writing a letter to the editor in support of or opposition to a legislative issue
- Providing oral and/or written testimony on a given topic
- Participating in voter registration drives and/or get out the vote campaigns
- Engaging in political action when necessary to achieve a goal.

The Systems Advocates also provides education and training to volunteers, individually and in group settings, whenever necessary to assist them in learning how to respond or improving their ability to respond to the action alerts.

The Center is always on the “lookout” for new advocates interested in getting involved in the community by becoming an SSAN Volunteer. No previous experience is necessary, just a desire to be part of an exciting team working together to create a barrier free environment for all New Yorkers.

If you think you might qualify, please contact Charlie at the Center at 607.432.8000 or via email at ccfi@ccfi.us.

In The News

“In The News” will be a regular section of “The Legislative Lookout” and will provide information about hot disability related topics. There is an “In The News” companion section on the Center’s web site (www.ccfi.us) that has several recent news articles, letters to the editor, and other documents dealing with a variety of disability related issues.



The SSAN has recently been working on a variety of disability issues including:

- Advocating with the Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) that New York needs more affordable accessible housing
- Working to compel the Division of Budget to make affordable accessible housing a priority in New York State in 2008!
- Advocating for the SHU bill that would allow New York State to provide more appropriate and humane in-prison residential and treatment services for prisoners with severe psychiatric disabilities.
- Assisting Senator Larkin in drafting legislation designed to improve polling site access for voters with disabilities by eliminating all waivers and establishing enforcement provisions.

**Don't forget to visit the
Center's web site at
www.ccfi.us**



SSAN Victories

As advocates, it sometimes seems like we are trying to climb a mountain. Even today, people with disabilities still face so many barriers in employment, education, housing, health care and voting that the barriers sometimes seem insurmountable.

That's why it is so important to celebrate the victories. We've all heard the old saying, "The longest journey begins with the first step." Well, it's an old saying because it's true. And if that first step is never taken then we can be sure the journey will never end.

It is our collective efforts and all our steps that will eventually allow us to reach the top of that mountain. But, in the meantime, there are plateaus that we are reaching and we are truly making a difference and helping to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities in New York. Some of the recent plateaus reached by the NYAIL SSAN include:

1. Enactment of legislation incorporating Title III ADA language into State Law
2. Enactment of the "Schaffer Bill," regarding Burden of Proof
3. Implementation of Federal IDEA in to State Law
4. Enactment of "Jonathan's Law"
5. Enactment of legislation to clarify Human Rights Law
6. Advancement of legislation to expand Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage (EPIC) to People with Disabilities

If you would like more information about any of these accomplishments, contact the Center at:

607.432.8000 or ccfi@ccfi.us



New York Association on Independent Living (NYAIL)

2008 Disability Priority Agenda Summary

1. INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTER (ILC) FUNDING

- Increase funding for ILCs by an additional \$5 million this year, including full, permanent funding for new Independent Living Centers in Ontario, Putnam, Herkimer and Sullivan counties.



2. HEALTH CARE

- Maintain and enhance Medicaid benefits, eligibility, coverage, and access to services. Eliminate the systemic bias that leads to unwanted placement in nursing homes and other institutions.
- Expand the facilitated enrollment network to include organizations familiar with public health insurance programs that serve people with disabilities. Expand the facilitated enrollment program into areas/communities where it doesn't currently exist.
- Increase rental/housing subsidies to participants in the Nursing Facility Transition and Diversion (NFTD) Medicaid waiver program.
- Expand coverage under New York's Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage (EPIC) program to people with disabilities under age 65.
- Increase access to comprehensive health care coverage for all people with disabilities, with the ultimate goal of providing universal health care for all New Yorkers.

3. EMPLOYMENT

- Shift state funding away from sheltered employment programs to more integrated options, with the goal of eventually phasing out state support for sheltered programs completely.
- Expand the Medicaid Buy-in program for working people with disabilities by increasing the resource limit and exempting spousal income.

4. HOUSING

- Incorporate the housing provisions of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act into state law.
- Establish standards for “Visitability” in state law to require all newly constructed single-family houses, townhouses and ground-floor units of duplexes and triplexes built with public funds to be made accessible.
- Create a housing trust fund that addresses the needs of people with disabilities, including people with very low incomes.

5. EDUCATION

- Establish a definition and standard for physical restraint in public schools. Require documentation by the school and written notification to the parent when restraint is used.

6. CIVIL RIGHTS

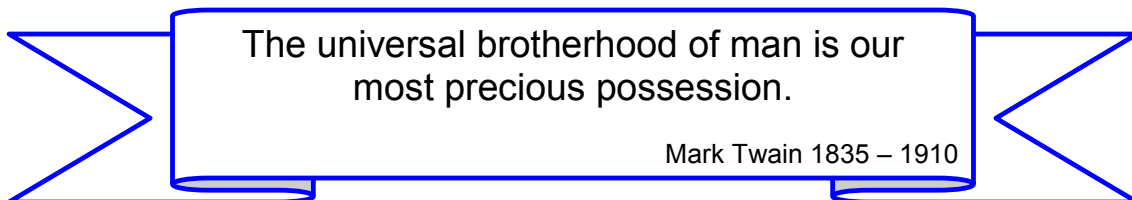
- Incorporate Title II of ADA into NYS Human Rights Law.
- Waive the State’s sovereign immunity to claims under the ADA and Section 504.

7. ELECTION REFORM

- Eliminate provisions in Section 4-104 (1-a) of the NYS Election Law allowing waiver of polling place accessibility requirements. Require polling places to comply with ADA accessibility guidelines and ensure access surveys are conducted at all polling places.

8. TRANSPORTATION

- Require transportation service providers, such as taxis, limousines and hotel shuttles to purchase accessible vehicles or otherwise ensure that they have the capacity to serve people with disabilities.



You're Invited!!

What: NYAIL Legislative Day

When: Monday, January 28th 10am to 4pm

Where: "The Well" in the Legislative Office Building (LOB) in Albany

You're invited to join hundreds of advocates in the LOB as they have the opportunity to meet and mingle with legislators to discuss pressing disability issues. A reception for legislators will be held in the afternoon. If you are interested or would like additional information about joining other advocates in Albany,

RSVP to the Center: 607.432.8000 or ccfi@ccfi.us

Hope to see you there!!



WE WANT YOU!!

Get involved! Come join us and become part of a team making a real difference in our community and in our state!

To learn more about how you can become involved in this exciting process contact:

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

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