

2011-J3862

LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION commemorating the observation of the 100th Anniversary of the birth of Abilities! Founder Dr. Henry Viscardi, Jr. on May 10, 2012

WHEREAS, It is the sense of this Legislative Body to recognize that the quality and character of life in the communities of New York State are reflective of the concerned and dedicated efforts of organizations and individuals who devote themselves to the welfare of the community and its citizenry and have made strong contributions to the disability community; and

WHEREAS, Attendant to such concern and fully in accord with its long-standing traditions, this Legislative Body is justly proud to commemorate the observation of the 100th Anniversary of the birth of Abilities! Founder Dr. Henry Viscardi, Jr. on May 10, 2012; and

WHEREAS, Abilities!, located in Albertson, New York is a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering children and adults with disabilities to be active, independent, and self-sufficient participants of society; and

WHEREAS, Abilities!, originally Abilities, Inc., formerly known as the National Center for Disability Services (NCDS), was begun by Dr. Viscardi in a garage in West Hempstead, New York in 1952 and, in keeping with his vision, has successfully demonstrated that people with disabilities can be productive contributors to society and is a significant provider of community-based services to thousands of people with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, One of the world's most highly respected pioneers for the rights and opportunities of people with disabilities, Dr. Henry Viscardi, Jr., passed away on Tuesday, April 13, 2004 at the age of 91; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Viscardi broke down barriers imposed by his own physical

challenges and built his career on the conviction that "there really are no disabled people, only people with varying degrees of ability"; and WHEREAS, Dr. Viscardi's bold vision transformed the way employers, educators and policy-makers viewed disabilities, laying the groundwork for landmark legislation mandating the integration of people with disabilities into everyday life; and

WHEREAS, Founded by Dr. Viscardi in 1952, Abilities! has evolved into one of the world's foremost facilities for educating and training people with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, Among Dr. Viscardi's many other contributions to public life, he served as an advisor on disability issues to every president from Franklin D. Roosevelt through Jimmy Carter; and

WHEREAS, Eleanor Roosevelt, in her introduction to one of Dr. Viscardi's books, wrote that his accomplishments reflect "a personal story of courage and determination, dignity and human rights"; and

WHEREAS, Known to many as Hank, Dr. Viscardi was born with underdeveloped legs and spent the first six years of his life in the Hospital for Deformities and Joint Diseases in Manhattan; and

WHEREAS, Upon receiving his first set of artificial limbs, at the age of 27, he looked the doctor in the eye and thanked him; the doctor's response stunned him; and

WHEREAS, The doctor said "I don't want to be thanked. I'll tell you what you can do, though. Someday maybe you'll have the chance to bring a new life to another boy. If you can help somebody else, that's all I'll ever ask."; and

WHEREAS, Inspired by this challenge, Dr. Viscardi not only went on to help one boy, he embarked on his lifelong mission to empower people with

disabilities to lead self-sufficient, productive lives, helping hundreds of people; and

WHEREAS, At Eleanor Roosevelt's urging, Dr. Viscardi left a successful private sector career in 1952 to establish Abilities, Inc., formerly

known as the National Center for Disability Services, a manufacturing enterprise staffed largely by injured World War II veterans, in a former warehouse in West Hempstead; and

WHEREAS, At a time when people with disabilities were all but excluded from the workforce, Abilities, Inc. was a revolutionary concept that demonstrated that people with disabilities could, and should be, productive contributors to society; within a few years, Abilities, Inc. was winning contracts from such defense industry giants as Grumman, General Electric and IBM, as well as the U.S. Department of Defense; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Viscardi's vision extended beyond the employment of people with disabilities, it also encompassed education and research; in the early 1960s, he moved his enterprise to a larger facility in Albertson, New York, where he established the Human Resources Center; and

WHEREAS, With new adult vocational training programs and a research center, the Human Resources Center expanded into the Career and Employment Institute (CEI) and the Research and Training Institute (RTI), the National Center for Disability Services, Abilities, Inc. and, subsequently, Abilities!, and entered the international spotlight; and

WHEREAS, In 1962, after a long, arduous process, Dr. Viscardi turned another of his dreams into reality by gaining a charter from the New York State Department of Education to establish the Human Resources School on the Albertson campus; and

WHEREAS, Upon Dr. Viscardi's retirement, the school, which had become one of the nation's leading K-12 educational institutions for children with severe physical and medical disabilities, was fittingly renamed the Henry Viscardi School in his honor; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Viscardi was a member of the faculty of the New York University School of Medicine's Clinical Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Department and his contributions to education have been recognized around the world; universities in England, Japan, Korea and Canada awarded him honorary doctoral degrees in law, education, science, humane letters and literature and, in 1975, he was honored with the New York

State Board of Regents' esteemed James E. Allen Jr. Memorial Award; and WHEREAS, Numerous professional and other organizations have, in addition, lauded Dr. Viscardi for his revolutionary influence on the business world's approach to employing people with disabilities; and WHEREAS, In 1957, he was the first non-medical recipient of the American Medical Association's Outstanding Service Citation, which had previously been given only four times since the AMA's founding over 100 years earlier; the National Rehabilitation Association presented Dr. Viscardi with its highest honor as well, the President's Medal; the Freedom Foundation of Valley Forge honored him with its American Exemplar Medal; in 1983 the Horatio Alger Association named him to its list of Distinguished Americans; and he was the recipient of the American Association of Retired Persons' 1992 Andrus Award for Community Service; and WHEREAS, Dr. Viscardi was the author of numerous articles and eight books; his book, A LETTER TO JIMMY, received the Niernberger Trichter Literary Award in Bonn, Germany and in addition to his Presidential appointments, he served as Chairman of New York State Governor Nelson Rockefeller's Committee on the Handicapped; and WHEREAS, At the time of his death in 2004, Dr. Viscardi was a resident of Kings Point, New York and was survived by his wife, Lucile, four daughters, sons-in-law, nine grandchildren and three great-grandchildren; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commemorate the observation of the 100th Anniversary of the birth of Abilities! Founder Dr. Henry Viscardi, Jr. on May 10, 2012; and be it further

RESOLVED, That copies of this Resolution, suitably engrossed, be transmitted to Abilities! and to the family of Dr. Henry Viscardi, Jr.