



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

# **Senate Passes Resolution & Legislative Package for New Yorkers with Disabilities**

Andrea Stewart-Cousins

June 10, 2010

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# SENATE MAJORITY: BREAKING BARRIERS



Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins introduced and passed a Legislative Resolution today, recognizing the hard work and achievements of the independent living movement on behalf of New Yorkers with disabilities. Independent Living Centers (ILCs) in New York State are part of a national network of centers that provide support, resources, and services to assist individuals in becoming as independent as possible. The introduction of the Resolution coincided with the passage of the Senate Democratic Majority's comprehensive package of legislation providing New Yorkers with disabilities expanded access to polling places, transportation and medical equipment, as well as ending discriminatory practices in employment, housing and public services.

Individuals with disabilities often face discriminatory practices in many different parts of their lives; sometimes accessing public transportation is difficult or impossible, qualified individuals are often passed over for job openings, and tenants often have a greater challenge renting places to live.

After decades of the State Legislature failing to establish basic rights against these discriminatory practices, the Democratic Majority has taken action to provide equal opportunity and access for people with disabilities in all aspects of daily life.

The plan includes:

- An expansion of polling locations that comply with the accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act;
- Equality for those with physical disabilities in regards to fares for public transportation;
- Holding insurance companies accountable for their lack of timeliness in reimbursing those who purchase their wheelchairs out-of-pocket;
- Ensuring those with disabilities are not discriminated against when seeking services—including programs and activities—from public entities.

These reforms take the most significant steps in decades towards ensuring equal treatment and protection under the law. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) became law to resolve discrimination issues on the Federal level by requiring employers to provide suitable accommodations for disabled employees, as well as to prohibit discrimination in wage determination, hiring and firing. However, we need to ensure that the ADA requirements do not yield a different level of discrimination in hiring as a result of misinformation or a fear of lawsuits under an ambiguous set of statutes.

Independent Living Centers are administered and primarily staffed by people with disabilities and provide a variety of community based services, such as peer counseling, independent living skills training, and assistance with medical needs, housing, education, employment and other necessary services that empower people with disabilities to live independent, fully-integrated lives in their communities. In addition to the many services these groups provide, for decades the Independent Living organizations have been the leading advocates for people with disabilities.

“Independent Living Centers in New York State provide invaluable services to thousands of New Yorkers with disabilities,” said Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins. “For example, in Westchester County, the ILC has partnered with other agencies to launch an Equal Access Campaign for people with disabilities. In addition to addressing the physical barriers that restrict access, the campaign also focuses on the attitudinal barriers that bar County residents with disabilities from full inclusion.”

ILC services contribute a net savings to the State of upwards of \$110 million each year as a result of alternatives to institutionalized care for people with disabilities. In fact, ILCs save New York taxpayers more than \$9 in institutionalization costs for every State dollar invested in ILCs.

“These centers have proven to be effective partners in helping government comply with the American with Disabilities Act and save money by supporting individuals with disabilities to live in cost-effective community settings,” concluded Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins.