



NEW YORK STATE SENATE DEMOCRATIC MAJORITY

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Senate Majority To Advance Legislation to Support New Yorkers with Disabilities

(Albany, NY) The Senate Democratic Majority today will advance legislation to protect New Yorkers with disabilities. This package will mandate building owners to develop an emergency evacuation plan for people with disabilities, establish the Office of the Independent Intellectual and Developmental Disability Ombudsman program, create the Care Demonstration Program, and replace instances of insensitive and derogatory language in the law in reference to individuals with mental illness. These bills will also protect an individual's right to an essential support person, provide retroactive relief for rent increase exemption assistance, and establish the Office for the Advocate of People with Disabilities.

“We must ensure disabled New Yorkers have the opportunities and tools they need to succeed and the protections and access to care that these bills will provide,” **Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins** said. “They enrich our communities and contribute so much to our state. I am proud of the Senate Majority’s efforts to protect members of our community who need assistance. The Senate Democratic Majority is committed to supporting individuals with disabilities, and we will keep moving forward towards a brighter, better future with equity for all.”

Bill Sponsor, and Chair of the Senate Committee on Disabilities, Senator John Mannion said, "Establishing a new Senate committee dedicated to protecting and supporting disabled New Yorkers sends a powerful message. It also comes with the moral obligation to deliver real and lasting change for individuals, families, caregivers, and stakeholders. Under the leadership of Andrea Stewart-Cousins, the State Senate is meeting these obligations. We are improving the lives of disabled New Yorkers in ways large and small, continuing the Senate’s renewed commitment to the I/DD community. I never want to let the disabilities community down. Ensuring we have the policies, funding, and proper supports in place to facilitate happy, meaningful, and productive lives for all I/DD New Yorkers is one of my guideposts."

The legislation being passed by the Senate Majority, includes:

- **Emergency Evacuation Plan:** This bill [S.1104](#) sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins will require building owners to develop an emergency

evacuation plan for people with disabilities who work or live in high-rise buildings in New York State.

- **Office of the Independent Intellectual and Developmental Disability Ombudsman Program:** This bill [S.1766A](#) sponsored by Senator John Mannion will establish the Office of the Independent Intellectual and Developmental Disability Ombudsman program to assist individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities in ensuring them access to appropriate care.
- **Care Demonstration Program:** This bill [S.4998](#) sponsored by Senator John Mannion will require the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities to establish the Care Demonstration Program, to provide community based care to individuals with developmental disabilities.
- **Insensitive Language Update:** This bill [S.4777A](#) sponsored by Senator John Mannion will replace certain instances in the law of the word "mentally ill person" with variations of "person with a mental illness" or "person with a mental disability."
- **Replace Derogatory Language:** This bill [S.6195](#) sponsored by Senator Roxanne Persaud will amend the social services law, in relation to replacing certain instances of the term "mentally retarded" with the term "individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities."
- **Disability Support Companion:** This bill [S.1035A](#) sponsored by Senator Joseph P. Addabbo allows for the presence of an essential support person for persons with disabilities for the duration or their stay in a general hospital.
- **Retroactive Rent Increase Relief:** This bill [S.3920](#) sponsored by Senator James Sanders will allow applicants who enrolled in the Senior Citizens Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) and Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE) programs after their original date of eligibility to receive a rent reduction beginning with the first day that they became eligible for such benefits.
- **Office for the Advocate of People with Disabilities:** This bill [S.1836](#) sponsored by Senator James Skoufis will establish the Office of the Advocate for People with Disabilities, to advocate on behalf of persons with disabilities and assure that persons with disabilities are afforded the opportunity to exercise all of their rights and responsibilities.

Bill Sponsor, Senator Joseph P Addabbo, said, "The right to accompany a patient into the hospital was denied for all family members, and tragically, thousands of patients suffered and passed away alone during the COVID-19 pandemic. For individuals with a disability where they are unable to communicate their wishes or understand their medical treatment, the situation is even more tragic. The hospital restrictions implemented during the pandemic were not only inconsistent with the Patient Bill of Rights, but also demonstrated the critical need for a new law allowing persons with disabilities to have an essential support person present as an advocate for their health decisions. I am proud to join my colleagues in approving this common-sense initiative."

Bill Sponsor, Senator Roxanne Persaud, said, "Today we passed long-overdue amendments to the Social Services Law to affirm New York's dedication to the care, dignity, and support of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. New York State officially stopped using the 'R' word in official titles, acronyms and documents just over a decade ago, but this degrading

word remains in numerous statutes. Thank you to Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins for supporting this important package of legislation.”

Bill Sponsor, Senator James Sanders, said, “It is our duty to protect our most vulnerable populations and that includes seniors and the disabled. This package of legislation is aimed at improving the lives of these individuals, which is especially important during these difficult times as we work to recover from the COVID pandemic. I look forward to the passage of these bills into law.”

Bill Sponsor, Senator James Skoufis, said, "All New Yorkers deserve to lead safe, successful, and meaningful lives, but the reality for many of our neighbors falls short due to a lack of resources that address their needs and abilities. I am honored to stand with my colleagues and our partners in the disability community to correct these injustices."

Senator Jamaal Bailey said, “Ensuring that all New Yorkers have equal access, opportunities, and guarantees is a mandate for our government. This package of legislation ensures that New Yorkers with disabilities receive proper advocacy, care, and have safety and security guaranteed. The passage of these bills will bolster services provided to disabled New Yorkers through instituting the Office of the Independent Intellectual and Developmental Disability Ombudsman and the Office of the Advocate for People with disabilities. Both are designed to assist those with disabilities and work to see that they receive proper care, are able to fulfill their responsibilities, and that the rights of disabled New Yorkers are being upheld. The safety of disabled New Yorkers is prioritized by requiring building owners to develop emergency evacuation plans for those with disabilities who live in high-rise buildings and mandating the allowance of an essential support person for those with disabilities who are hospitalized. Language matters. As such, changing the verbiage of our laws to respectfully account for all New Yorkers is an essential part of our effort to make our government inclusive and representative for all New Yorkers. I would like to thank Majority Leader Andrea Stewart Cousins for her leadership, as well as my colleagues who sponsored the pieces of legislation included in this package.”

Senator Alessandra Biaggi said, “No one should be denied the right to advocate for appropriate medical treatment because of their disability, and it is our responsibility to ensure the disability community has access to equitable treatment and care. This legislation recognizes the injustices New Yorkers with disabilities experience and prioritizes their needs. I applaud my colleagues in the Senate and Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins for leading on this issue.”

Senator Jabari Brisport said, “When COVID-19 upended the systems we were used to, our society quickly found ways to provide resources and accommodations to many abled people -- that were long denied to those with disabilities. We have all seen proof over the past year that, with sufficient motivation, our businesses and governments are capable of setting up structures that enable people to thrive in the face of challenges. We must demand no less for those with disabilities.”

Senator John E. Brooks said, “As lawmakers, we have not done nearly enough in the past to support New Yorkers with disabilities. Programs in support of this population often receive little funding yet are the first to see cuts to their services. I applaud Senator Mannion, Majority Leader

Cousins, and the others who have fought to advance this legislative package that will tackle long-standing issues for people with disabilities. Now more than ever, we have a responsibility to adequately support our state's most vulnerable populations and ensure that everyone in our state has access to the services they need. I wholeheartedly support these measures that will help so many of our fellow New Yorkers.”

Senator Simcha Felder said, “I am proud to provide strong support for people with disabilities and their families. The bills we pass today improve safety and care, and direct assistance for individuals fighting for their rights. Our support for people with disabilities is crucial and I take this responsibility to heart.”

Senator Andrew Gounardes said, “As New Yorkers, we have an obligation to support and advocate for those with disabilities across our state, and to ensure that they have the appropriate care they need to lead a fulfilling life without barriers to their well-being. By taking measures to offer community based care, disability support companions, rent reduction, and the establishment of an advocacy office, we're making sure that people with disabilities have a set of comprehensive reforms to lift them up and give them important resources to enhance their lives. I'm pleased that these bills have passed, and I applaud the action we've taken to provide the highest quality of care and support that this community deserves.”

Senator Brad Hoylman said, “New Yorkers with disabilities deserve the same access, equality and opportunity all New Yorkers deserve. This package of legislation will help bring our state towards that ideal. I'm appreciative of Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins' efforts to make New York's laws and government more accommodating, accepting and supportive of New Yorkers with disabilities.”

Senator Robert Jackson said, “New Yorkers living with disabilities have been left even further behind during this pandemic. As legislators of conscience, we have a responsibility to heed calls for disability justice from our constituents. This legislation is a promising start that lays a foundation for future work to dismantle the ablist so rooted in our society.”

Senator Shelley B. Mayer said, “I am so pleased the Senate has passed legislation to increase protections and opportunities for people with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation will ensure people with developmental and intellectual disabilities get the care they need and have an important institutional source of advocacy. The pandemic revealed many shortcomings in our society and care, including for people with disabilities. I am proud the Senate is working to address those gaps to ensure all New Yorkers can thrive in New York.”

Senator Luis Sepúlveda said, “This comprehensive bill package establishes an ombudsman program for people with disabilities, requires an emergency evacuation plan for disabled individuals living or working in high-rise buildings in New York State, and updates insensitive and derogatory language when referring to individuals with disabilities. I am proud to stand with my Senate colleagues and support legislation that will protect the rights of New Yorkers with disabilities.”

Senator Toby Ann Stavisky said, “New Yorkers with physical, mental and developmental disabilities deserve to be treated with dignity and care. This legislation helps ensure that these

men and women are given the accommodations and support necessary to live their lives to the fullest. I thank Senator Stewart-Cousins and my colleagues in the Senate Majority for moving this legislative package forward.”

Senator Sean Ryan said, “As legislators, we have the ability – and a special responsibility – to assist people who are in need of support. The legislation advanced today will make a profound difference in the lives of New Yorkers with intellectual or developmental disabilities, and those with a mental illness or a mental disability. We must keep working to address the challenges faced by underrepresented communities here in the Empire State.”

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