



# Connecticut Disability Advocacy Collaborative Bulletin

“Enhancing the effectiveness of disability activism by organizing and empowering individuals, families, groups and organizations”

## Empowerment! Opportunity! Justice!

**February 2007**

Need this newsletter in an alternative format?  
Please let us know.

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## **Update on Disability Advocacy Collaborative Activities**

### **Upcoming Meetings of Regional Advocacy Networks**

Northwest – February 15 – 10 am – Litchfield Arc in Torrington – contact: Larry Robinson (robinsonlarry@yahoo.com)

Southwest - February 21 – 10 am – Norwalk Police Department – contact: Carol Kana (pkana@snet.net)

Danbury Area - February 22 – 5 pm – Ability Beyond Disability in Bethel – contact Pam Arturi (parturi@abilitybeyonddisability.org)

North Central – February 26 – 10 am – Independence Unlimited in Hartford – contact: Candace Low (clow@independenceunlimited.org)

Waterbury Area – February 28 – 3 pm – St. John's Episcopal Church in Waterbury – contact Mike Valuckas (mike.valuckas@independencenorthwest.org)

### **The Budget is Coming!**

Governor M. Jodi Rell will unveil her two-year budget proposal on Wednesday, February 7. Advocates interested in state funding for important state programs should pay close attention to her proposal. If a program you are interested in is in the Governor's budget, you are halfway home. If not, there is still a chance you can get the Appropriation Committee – controlled by Democrats – to take action. To be an effective advocate you need to be fully informed of both the Governor's proposal and the legislature's response.

### **Key 2007 Legislative Committee Chairs State General Assembly**

#### **Appropriations**

Sen. Toni Harp

Rep. Denise Merrill

#### **Finance, Revenue & Bonding**

Sen. Eileen Daily

Rep. Cameron Staples

#### **Housing**

Sen. Edwin Gomes

Rep. Kenneth Green

#### **Human Services**

Sen. Jonathan Harris

Rep. Peter Villano

#### **Judiciary**

Sen. Andrew McDonald

Rep. Michael Lawlor

#### **Public Health**

## **Do You Know Who your State Legislators Are?**

If you want to become active in legislative advocacy, you will need to know who your local legislators are. So check out: [www.cga.ct.gov/maps/townlist.asp](http://www.cga.ct.gov/maps/townlist.asp) . If more than one representative is listed in your town, call your local town or city hall and give them your address so that they can tell you which is yours.

The phone numbers to reach your legislators are listed below. Please note that there are toll-free numbers if you are not in the Hartford area.

Senate Democrats: (860) 240-8600 or (800) 842-1420  
Senate Republicans: (860) 240-8800 or (800) 842-1421  
House Democrats: (860) 240-8500 or (800) 842-1902  
House Republicans: (860) 240-8600 or (800) 842-1423

## **Human Services Committee to Hold Important Hearing**

Also on February 8, the Human Services Committee of the state General Assembly is holding a hearing that includes proposed bills on expanding home care. This is a good opportunity for interested individuals to come and talk about the home and community based waiver and pilot state funded home and community based programs for people with disabilities.

The public hearing will begin at 9:30 am in Room 2A of the LOB. Please submit 50 copies of written testimony to Committee staff one hour prior to the start of the hearing in Room 2A. Please submit an electronic copy of written testimony to the Clerk at [jeanie.phillips@cga.ct.gov](mailto:jeanie.phillips@cga.ct.gov). Sign-up for the hearing will begin at 8:00 am in Room 2A. The first hour of the hearing is reserved for legislators, Mayors, First Selectmen and state agency Commissioners. Speakers will be limited to three minutes of testimony. The Committee encourages witnesses to submit a written statement and to confine oral testimony to a summary of that statement.

Some of the bills that will be heard:

- Proposed S. B. No. 54 - to require DSS to seek a Title XIX federal waiver to include personal assistance as a covered service, and to permit spouses to serve as personal assistants in the state-funded personal assistance pilot that is part of the Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders
- Proposed S.B. 387 – to require DSS to utilize the same income eligibility criteria for the Money Follows the Person program as is used for Medicaid long-term care eligibility
- Proposed H.B 5638 – to expand participation in the Money Follows the Person program to more than 100 slots
- Proposed S. B. No. 384 and Proposed H.B 5663 – to appropriate additional funds to expand services under the Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders

## **Another Public Hearing on the 8<sup>th</sup>!**

The Select Committee on Housing will hold a public hearing on Thursday, February 8, 2007 at 1:00 pm in Room 1B of the LOB. Please submit 50 copies of written testimony to Committee staff one hour prior to the start of the hearing. Sign-up for the hearing will begin at 12:00 pm in Room 1B. The first hour of the hearing is reserved for legislators, State agency officials and municipal officials. Speakers will be limited to three minutes of testimony.

**SUBJECT MATTER: Elderly and Disabled Housing**

- Proposed S. B. No. 50 – to limit residency in state funded housing projects to those 62 years of age and older
- Proposed H. B. No. 5047 – to require DSS to partner with DECD, DMHAS, and CHFA to establish a program of rental assistance and supportive services for non-elderly individuals with disabilities in public or private housing, and to provide \$1 million in support of such program.

### **And Yet Another!**

The Select Committee on Children is holding a public hearing on Thursday, February 8. One of the bills being heard, SB 977, addresses the use of restraints and seclusion in Connecticut schools. The bill was proposed by the Chair of the Children's Committee, Senator Ed Meyer. The bill itself is only in draft form and the purpose of the hearing is to find out what needs to be done about the use of restraint and seclusion in Connecticut schools. The Office of Protection and Advocacy held a public forum on December 13, 2006 on this issue, and those who testified at that forum are invited to come to the Legislative Office Building (LOB) on February 8th to tell their stories directly to legislators.

The public hearing will commence at 2:00 pm in Room 2C of the LOB. Testifiers should submit 50 copies of written testimony to Committee staff one hour prior to the start of the hearing outside of Room 2C of the LOB. Sign-up for the hearing will begin at 1:00 P.M. The first hour of the hearing is reserved for legislators and state agency heads. Speakers will be limited to three minutes of testimony. For more information call the Clerk of the Select Committee on Children at 860-240-0370.

### **Support Expanding Medicaid and SAGA**

Advocates see a real chance of obtaining Medicaid and SAGA (State Administered General Assistance) coverage for a significant number of new people this year, as well as an increase provider rates. Senator Donald Williams, President of the Senate, has proposed increasing the number of children and their parents covered by HUSKY and providing SAGA coverage for individuals with higher incomes. And it is expected that Rep. James Amann, Speaker of the House, will support at least increased HUSKY coverage for kids.

Now is the time to tell legislators that expanding coverage for Medicaid and SAGA:

- is an important and sensible component of universal health care
- will provide essential health insurance for our most vulnerable residents

- helps to ensure access to comprehensive health care for our poorest children, their parents, the elderly and disabled and,
- prevents the cost shifting that endangers the fiscal health of our health care facilities and increases costs for our business community and their employees.

## **healthcare4every1**

Healthcare4every1 is a statewide advocacy campaign coordinated by the Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut. The goal of the campaign is to organize an active, vibrant and diverse network of concerned residents and organizations in order to build public and political support to achieve universal health care in Connecticut.

Those organizations endorsing the campaign agree to make the issue of universal health care a high priority on their legislative agendas in 2007. Supporters of the healthcare4every1 campaign also endorse the Institute of Medicine's principles for universal health care:

- health care coverage should be universal - it should cover everyone.
- health care coverage should be continuous, portable from job to job, and cover those who are between employed and unemployed status
- health care coverage should be affordable, especially to low-income individuals and families.
- health insurance should enhance health and well-being by promoting access to high-quality care that is effective, efficient, safe, timely, patient-centered and equitable.

The campaign's Web site ([www.healthcare4every1.org](http://www.healthcare4every1.org)) is collecting stories from people experiencing problems with access to health care in Connecticut. Organizations endorsing the healthcare4every1 campaign will be listed on the website, with a link to their website, if requested. In addition, a Universal Health Care Foundation staff member would be happy to speak at an upcoming board meeting, committee meeting or conference of your organization. Finally, the Foundation may publicize this endorsement as part of their promotional efforts or to enlist other organizations to join the campaign.

## **Connecticut Receives MFP Grant**

Connecticut is one of seventeen states that have been awarded federal grants for demonstration programs to keep people in the community and out of institutions. These awards, announced January 17, are the first round of grants that will bring \$24.2 million to the state over the next five years. The award will allow Connecticut to shift Medicaid's traditional emphasis on institutional care to a system offering greater choices for individuals and a full range of home and community-based services. Seven hundred nursing facility residents will be impacted over the next five years. Connecticut's Money Follows the Person award, to be administered by the Department of Social Services, totals \$1.3 million for 2006-2007.

## **Community-Based Transportation Service Planning**

The Connecticut Department of Transportation and regional planning organizations across the state are conducting a new community planning process for federally funded transportation of older adults (60+), persons with disabilities and individuals with low incomes. The Connecticut plan will determine how funds allocated under the federal Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (also referred to as SAFETELU) will be spent in Connecticut. The plan will be developed through a process that includes representatives of public, private and nonprofit human services transportation providers and participation by the public.

In Connecticut the Plan is being referred to as LOCHSTP (Locally-Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation). Reports will be submitted to ConnDOT from the five planning areas shortly. The planning areas are looking for your input. Contact the Department of Transportation at [dotadmin.ctrdes@po.state.ct.us](mailto:dotadmin.ctrdes@po.state.ct.us) or the Transit Administrator, P.O. Box 317546, Newington, CT 06131 and they will direct your inquiry to the right place. ConnDOT's goal is to have an initial plan in place by April 2007.

One of the newest opportunities (known as the "New Freedom Initiative) includes funds to go beyond ADA transportation guidelines known as the New Freedom Initiative. The following are some of the possibilities for use of these funds: door-*through*-door (however door-*to*-door service is not eligible), providing escorts or assisting riders through the door of their destination, paratransit service beyond ¾ mile boundary, same day service, additional hours of service beyond the fixed route, new service in rural areas that may serve a greater population, but primarily meets the needs of individuals with disabilities (as well as other target populations) may be fully or partially supported, purchasing vehicles and supporting accessible taxi, ridesharing and vanpooling programs (FTA proposes that an accessible taxi be defined as a vehicle having the capacity to accommodate a passenger who uses a "common wheelchair" as defined under 49 CFR 37.3, at a minimum, while remaining in his/her personal mobility device inside the vehicle and meeting same requirements for lifts ramps and securement systems specified in 49 CFR part 38, subpart B), administering voucher and transit pass programs (but not for the purchase of passes), supporting mobility management among public transportation providers and human service agencies providing coordinated transportation services, supporting volunteer driver and aide programs, new feeder services to commuter rail, commuter bus, intercity rail and intercity bus stations, for which complementary paratransit service is not required under the ADA. making accessibility improvements to transit and inter-modal stations not designated as key stations.

## **DNEC Has New Executive Director**

The Disabilities Network of Eastern Connecticut, one of five centers for independent living in Connecticut, has hired a new Executive Director. Catherine Ferry was the executive director of the Region II Regional Mental Health Board in Middletown for 23 years. She has extensive private not-for-profit administrative and direct service experience in disability advocacy, battered women's programming, and legislative and public education regarding physical and behavioral health disabilities in adults and children. As the new director of DNEC, she will be responsible

for guiding the agency in its mission to empower persons with disabilities in eastern Connecticut to make personal choices to improve the quality of their lives as well as to effect positive change that promotes the inclusion of all persons with disabilities in society.

The Disability Advocacy Collaborative welcomes Catherine to her new role.

### **Tube-feeding At Thirty-thousand Feet**

The Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities and the Social Role Valorization Implementation Project (SRV/IP) will sponsor a one-day workshop on people with developmental disabilities and complex medical conditions to be held on Thursday April 12 from 10 am to 4 pm (check-in at 9:30 am) at the Institute of Technology and Business Development, Central CT State University, 185 Main Street, New Britain. Presents will be Cathy Ludlum, Manchester, CT and Adam Hildebrand and Jo Massarelli, SRV/IP.

This workshop is a follow-up to the September 25, 2006 Summit on Children with Disabilities – Kids and Chances of a Lifetime: People and Policy Matters. This workshop will emphasize that values matter even more than policy.

This workshop explores highly charged, value-laden issues in medical decision-making by presenting the equality of life perspective in contrast to the “quality of life” mind-set. A fundamental assumption underlying this workshop is that all people have equal worth, and therefore medical decisions should reflect the inherent and intrinsic dignity of every human being. Unfortunately, in today’s world, this is often not the case, given how the “quality of life” perspective has become dominant in medical settings.

This workshop will explain how the equality of life perspective relates to the more common areas of medical decision-making, such as treatment decisions, pain control, withholding of treatment, withdrawal of life supports, food and water, advance directives, and surrogate decision making.

This workshop is free and includes lunch, parking and handouts. Registration will be announced in March 2007. Seating will be limited.

### **NEAT Marketplace Offers AT Workshop**

On April 27, the New England Assistive Technology (NEAT) Marketplace will host its 2007 Expo entitled “Total Access for Everyone”. The event showcases new and existing technology from a variety of manufacturers and distributors. Beginning at 9:00 there will be demonstrations, opportunities for hands-on-training and conversations with the professionals who make AT devices and the people who use them. Go to their website at [neatmarketplace.org](http://neatmarketplace.org) to get more information.

## **Estate Planning for Individuals with Disabilities**

United Cerebral Palsy of Eastern Connecticut, Families United, and The ARC of New London County are hosting an informative estate planning session with Anthony Recck, MedDESK Specialist, on March 8 at 7:00 pm at UCP of Eastern CT, 42 Norwich Rd. (Route 32) Quaker Hill. MedDESK's mission is to help families plan for the future of their children or other dependents with special needs. The right kind of planning includes preserving government benefits and providing insurance and other financial solutions which can help provide a lifetime of quality care. Call Cheryl at 860-443-3800, ext. 11 to reserve your seat.

## **CLRC to Hold Annual Meeting**

The Annual Meeting of the Connecticut Lifespan Respite Coalition will be held on Wednesday, February 14th from 9:30-11:30 am at The Village at Kensington Place in Meriden. For more information call Joy Liebeskind at 860-563-3232, or e-mail her at SJSJL@cox.net.

## **AFCAMP Workshops**

The African American/Caribbean American Parent (AFCAMP) advocacy organization will hold two special events during the month of February. Its support group will hold its monthly meeting on Friday, February 16 from 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm at HARC - 900 Asylum Avenue in Hartford. The guest speaker will be Dr. Mark Zola, PhD, Clinical Neuro-Psychologist.

And on Tuesday February 27, also at HARC and also from 6:00 – 8:00 pm, a workshop for parents and young adults with disabilities (15-21) will cover the topic:

“Transitions: What Happens After Age 18?”

Transportation to both events will be provided for Hartford residents. Space is limited so please call and make reservations. For more information call the AFCAMP office at 860-297-4358.

The events co-sponsors include the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities, the Department of Children and Families, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, the Connecticut Health Foundation, and the Tow Foundation.

## **Family Support Council to Hold Meet and Greet**

On Wednesday, Feb. 14 from 9:00 – 10:30 am the Connecticut Family Support Council will hold its annual Legislative Meet & Greet Breakfast at the Legislative Office Building in Hartford. The Council is looking for family members who can provide written testimony based on personal experiences they have had. If you would like to testify on one of the Council's legislative priorities, please contact Karen Zrenda (see below). There will be a limit of 3 - 5 minutes per presentation.

The Family Support Council's top three priorities include:

1. Ensure children with disabilities and special health care needs have medical insurance coverage they need.

\*Katie Beckett Waiver

\*Commercial insurance issues

\*Medicaid Buy-In

2. Ensure there is a competent, trained and skilled workforce available to provide quality health care and other community based supports to children with disabilities.

3. Continue to support expansion of services for children who do not have mental retardation.

If you are able to attend, invite your legislators (call and/or e-mail them) to attend as well. Go to [www.cga.ct.gov](http://www.cga.ct.gov) to find out who your legislators are and to get their contact information. Some families may even want make an appointment to meet their representative before or after the event should the legislator be unable to attend the February 14 event.

If you have any further questions, please e-mail Karen Zrenda at [Karen.zrenda@yale.edu](mailto:Karen.zrenda@yale.edu) or call 203 785-7176.

### **Educational Advocacy**

The Center for Children's Advocacy at the UConn Law School is sponsoring an educational advocacy workshop on Monday, February 26 from 8:30 – 10:00 am in Room 204 of Starr Hall, on the Law School Campus. The workshop, designed primarily for attorneys, will include an overview of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), with tips for attorneys, and will also highlight the red flag issues that may help identify children with special education needs early on in their school years. It will also cover recent developments in child law and changes to rules of professional conduct.

Interested persons should respond by February 16 to [etremont@kidscounsel.org](mailto:etremont@kidscounsel.org).

### **Save the Date!**

The Klebanoff Institute of Special Education at the University of Connecticut and the University of Connecticut A.J. Pappanikou Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities are sponsoring a workshop on the IDEA regulations on May 9, 2007 at the Connecticut Grand Hotel in Waterbury. Alexa Posny (Invited), the Director of Office of Special Education Programs in the U.S. Department of Education, and Jeanne M. Kincaid, J.D. will be presenting. More detailed information will be available at [www.uconnucedd.org](http://www.uconnucedd.org) later this month.

### **DD Network to Sponsor Forum**

The Connecticut Developmental Disabilities Network is sponsoring a legislative forum on supports for children with special health care needs on February 20. Please consider attending this event and inviting your Connecticut legislators to attend as well.

Keeping Kids Home: Support for Families with Children with Special Health Care Needs  
February 20, 2007  
10 am to 12 noon  
Room 1C of the Legislative Office Building  
Capitol Avenue, Hartford

The event will feature presentations by Julie & Katie Beckett, Family Voices; the Catalyst Center, Boston University; Molly Cole, CT Birth to Three; and Jeanne Milstein, Connecticut Child Advocate

Please consider sending the information about this event to your state legislators and encouraging them to attend. To find your legislators' email addresses or phone numbers, visit [www.cga.ct.gov/maps/townlist.asp](http://www.cga.ct.gov/maps/townlist.asp). For more information or to view the flyer for this event, visit [www.uconnucedd.org/](http://www.uconnucedd.org/).

To request sign language interpreters or accommodations email [jjagger@uchc.edu](mailto:jjagger@uchc.edu).

The Connecticut Developmental Disabilities Network is a partnership of the Office of Protection & Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities, the Council on Developmental Disabilities, and the University of Connecticut Center for Excellence in Disabilities.

### **“We Belong” to Hold Second Gala**

“We Belong” of Fairfield County will be holding its second annual Gala Celebration on May 17, honoring those in their community who demonstrate excellence in the promotion of inclusion. They are looking for nominations of individuals to be recognized, including educators, related service providers, administrators, youth group leaders, recreation providers, and social service workers.

Nomination should be sent no later than March 11 to Eva Greenwald at [evagreenwald@sbcglobal.net](mailto:evagreenwald@sbcglobal.net). You may also reach her by phone at 203-554-4462. Please indicate the person's name, title, address, phone numbers, email address and detailed reasons why they should receive the “We Belong: Inclusion in Fairfield County” award. They will receive their awards in a ceremony preceded by a keynote address by David Shaw, Esq., lead attorney for the PJ Case. They will also received publicity for their work in press releases and newspapers articles.

“We Belong” will be holding the following monthly meetings, all at the Westport Library from 6:30-8:30 pm (call 203-291-4840 for directions):

- Tuesday March 27: Update on the New Federal and State Guidelines and Regulation with Terri DeFrancis from the Bureau of Special Education of the Connecticut Dept of Education.
- Wednesday April 11: Inclusion Success Stories featuring a panel of parents, educators, administrators, service providers and students.
- Thursday May 17: Gala Celebration featuring an update on the PJ Case Settlement with Attorney David Shaw and the presentation of awards to local heroes who promote excellence in inclusion.

RSVP to attend meetings: [evagreenwald@sbcglobal.net](mailto:evagreenwald@sbcglobal.net) or 203-554-4462

## **Keep your Utilities On! Statewide Legal Services Sponsors Utility Days**

Are you worried about a utility shut-off this Spring? Are you facing utility payments that you can't afford? Statewide Legal Services (SLS) may be able to help you. Once again, SLS is offering Utility Days where legal advocates will try to come up with a workable payment plan for both you and the utility company. **Please Note:** Budget counseling is provided, but there is NO direct cash assistance. If you have any questions regarding utility days, please call Statewide Legal Assistance at 1-800-453-3320.

### **Utility Day Dates & Locations:**

#### **March 2 & 3rd, 2007**

Bridgeport - 752 East Main Street Call first for an appointment: Bridgeport Department of Social Services, 332-3028 or 576-7416.

#### **March 10, 2007**

Waterbury – Saturday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., N.O.W., 232 North Elm Street (for customers of Northeast Utilities & Yankee Gas)

#### **March 17, 2007**

Hartford – Saturday, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., South Congregational Church, 277 Main Street (for customers of Northeast Utilities/Connecticut Natural Gas)

#### **March 31, 2007**

New Britain – Saturday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Connecticut Bar Association, 30 Bank Street (for customers of Northeast Utilities/Connecticut Natural Gas)

#### **April 14, 2007**

New Haven – Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Hall Of Records, 200 Orange Street (for customers of United Illuminating/Southern Connecticut Gas)

## **Bowling Anyone?**

Looking for some fun? Bowl New England, a growing bowling center operator of nineteen locations throughout the Northeast, has just the thing. Bowl New England has lanes in Groton, Windsor Locks, Vernon, and Bristol. The Bristol lanes are currently undergoing a \$1.5 million renovation.

All facilities feature state-of-the-art bowling lanes with fully automatic scoring, Bumper rails for younger bowlers, and lightweight, moveable bowling ramps for bowlers with disabilities. All centers feature Galactic Bowling, which entails black lights, special effect lighting, glow-in-the-dark bowling pins, interactive games, and a live DJ every Friday and Saturday night. You may book Galactic Bowling at other times for events, schedule permitting.

The facilities are also equipped with a full service Snack Bar and Lounge, featuring a wide variety of appetizers, meals, and great beverages. Arcade games are in

all locations, and they now carry redemption gaming rooms in Windsor Locks, Vernon, and Bristol.

For more information, call:

Holiday Bowl - Groton at 860-445-6500, ask for Marie or Andi

Bradley Bowl - Windsor Locks at 860-623-2597, ask for Carl

Spare Time - Vernon at 860-875-2583, ask for Patti

Spare Time - Bristol at 860-583-1669, ask for Mark

## **A Family Support and Networking Group for Parents**

The Southwest Family Support Network and the Family Center at St Vincent's Special Needs Services has begun a family support and networking group for parents who raising children with disabilities. The group will meet the first Thursday of the month from 7:00-8:30 pm at the St. Vincent's Special Needs Services Family Center - 95 Merritt Blvd. in Trumbull. The meetings will allow parents to connect with other parents for:

- Information and Resource Sharing
- Presentations and discussions with community resource and service providers
- Support

An organizational meeting of the group was held on February 1. The next meeting is scheduled for March 1. For more information contact: Lisa Sheppard, [lnshep@aol.com](mailto:lnshep@aol.com), 203-556-7317 (SW Regional Coordinator, Connecticut Family Support Network) or Donna Kennedy, [dkennedy@stvincents.org](mailto:dkennedy@stvincents.org), 203-386-2790 (Family Center, St Vincent's Special Needs Services).

## **Limited SAGA Vision and Transportation Services Now Available**

Limited vision and transportation services became available to eligible State Administered General Assistance (SAGA) medical recipients covered under the Community Health Network starting on January 1. Recipients are able to have one eye exam and one pair of eyeglasses per year but will have to obtain these from a participating eye care center or provider. For more information about vision services please call, 1-800-879-690.

Medical transportation through livery service (a private cab or car) will be available for SAGA recipients who use a wheelchair or those who are seeing a specialist for post operative services. SAGA recipients will also be able to receive transportation assistance for visits to oncologists, cardiologists, outpatient rehabilitation services, stroke related specialist services, and HIV related specialist services. These visits may be by livery or a shared ride on a van. Members with any of these needs should call Coordinated Transportation Solutions (CTS) at 1-877-423-6794 to set up transportation arrangements. If you are unsure of what type of benefits you qualify for or have additional questions, you should call SAGA Member Services at 1-866-361-7242.

Monthly cash benefit standards for SAGA recipients are as follows: Unemployable recipient (\$200); transitional recipient who pays for shelter (\$200); transitional recipient who does not pay for shelter (\$50); transitional recipient in emergency shelter (\$50); eligible families (TFA rate minus \$50).

## **Living and Working with Disabilities: Tax Benefits and Credits**

The following presents basic information about existing tax credits and benefits that may be available to qualifying taxpayers with disabilities, parents of children with disabilities. More detailed information on these topics can be found in IRS Publication 907—“Tax Highlights for Persons with Disabilities” and in the other publications cited below.

As a person with a disability, you may qualify for some of the following tax deductions, income exclusions, and credits. For more detailed information, please take a look at the IRS publications referenced:

- **Standard Deduction**—If you are legally blind, you may be entitled to a higher standard deduction on your tax return. See IRS Publication 501
- **Gross Income**—Certain disability-related payments may be excluded from gross income. These include compensatory damages for a physical injury or sickness; a permanent loss, or the loss of the use, of a part or function of your body; or a permanent disfigurement. Veterans Administration (VA) disability benefits and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) may also be excluded from your gross income. See IRS Publication 525
- **Impairment-Related Work Expenses**—If you have a physical or mental disability that limits your ability to function as an employee, you may be able to deduct as a miscellaneous deduction some of your work expenses related to your impairment. Some examples would be an on-the-job attendant, a screen reader, or a sign language interpreter. See IRS Publication 529
- **Credit for the Elderly or Disabled**—You may be entitled to the Credit for the Elderly or Disabled if you are 65 or older, or if you were under 65 at the end of the calendar year, permanently and totally disabled and you received taxable disability income. See IRS Publication 524
- **Medical Expenditures**—You may be able to deduct home improvements and additions that are added primarily for medical care. The cost of certain educational services and equipment as medical expenses are also allowable, as long as these expenses are made to alleviate your physical or mental condition. Examples of potentially qualifying improvements are the installation of ramps or an elevator; the extra costs for Braille books over regular printed editions; or amounts paid to purchase, train, and maintain a dog or other service animal for assisting blind, deaf, or physically disabled individuals. See IRS Publication 502

If you are a parent of a child with a disability, you may qualify for some of the following tax exemptions, deductions and credits. For more detailed information, please take a look at the IRS publications and forms referenced:

- Dependents—You may be able to claim your disabled child as an exemption, regardless of age, even if your child received income for work performed at a sheltered workshop. In addition, if your disabled child received SSI, you may still be able to claim them as a dependent. For more information on when you qualify to claim your disabled child as a dependent under these circumstances, see the IRS Publication 501
- Adoption Credit—You may be able to claim an increased tax credit for expenses for the adoption of a child with special needs. See IRS Form 8839
- Medical Expenditures—Special schooling for a child with a physical or mental disability or one needing psychiatric treatment may be deductible as a medical expense. This includes special instruction or training such as lip-reading, sign language, speech instruction, or Braille. (See also “Medical Expenditures” in the first section of this publication.) See IRS Publication 502
- Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)—The EITC is a refundable tax credit for working parents with low to moderate earnings. Those who qualify can reduce their federal tax liability, potentially receiving a refund. The age limitation rules that generally apply in determining a qualifying child for purposes of the EITC are waived if the child is permanently and totally disabled. See IRS Publication 596
- Child or Dependent Care Credit—If you pay someone to care for your dependent child or other qualifying person so that you can work or look for work, you may be able to claim a credit for those expenses. The age limitation rules that generally apply in determining a qualifying person for purposes of this credit are waived if the person is physically or mentally unable to care for him or herself.

### **Contact Local Offices in Connecticut**

Face-to-face Tax Help: IRS Taxpayer Assistance Centers are your source for personal tax help when you believe your tax issue cannot be handled online or by phone and you want face-to-face assistance. If you need to resolve a tax problem, have questions about how the tax law applies to your individual tax return, or you are more comfortable talking with someone face-to-face, visit your local Taxpayer Assistance Center (see below) where you can spread out your records and talk with an IRS representative across the counter. Note: Before visiting your local office contact them to see what services are available. Services may vary from site to site. You can get these services on a walk-in, non-advance appointment basis. Hours of operation: Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m-4:30 p.m. (subject to change). Multilingual assistance is available in every office.

City	Street Address	Telephone
Bridgeport	915 Lafayette Blvd.	(203) 384-5818
Danbury	131 West St.	(203) 840-4195
Hartford	135 High St.	(860) 756-4505
New Haven	150 Court St.	(203) 781-3195
New London	2 Howard St.	(860) 439-7963
Norwalk	24 Belden Ave.	(203) 840-4195
Waterbury	14 Cottage Pl.	(203) 596-4727

If face-to-face assistance is not a priority for you, you may also get help with IRS letters or resolve tax account issues by phone, toll free at 1-800-829-1040. You can also call the Taxpayer Advocate Service at 860-756-4555 in Hartford or 1-877-777-4778 elsewhere, or see Publication 1546.

### **Connecticut Department of Revenue Services: Free State Income Tax Assistance**

Free assistance in completing Connecticut returns is available from the Connecticut Department of Revenue Services (DRS) by telephone or in person at five walk-in offices. If you go to their offices for help in preparing your Connecticut income tax return you must arrive by 4 p.m. and you must bring all of the following items: your completed federal income tax return; your social security card (and your spouse's social security card if you are filing a joint return); state copies of all W-2 forms and any other forms showing Connecticut tax withheld; property tax payment information if you paid property tax in Connecticut on your home or motor vehicle; photo identification (driver's license, passport, or other government issued photo identification). PLEASE NOTE: Both spouses must be present if you are filing a joint return. DRS does not provide assistance in completing your federal return.

Other resources:

- Federal and State Tax Assistance from AARP—AARP's Tax-Aide Program, a partnership between the AARP Foundation and the Internal Revenue Service, provides free tax counseling and preparation services to middle-and low-income taxpayers, with special attention to people age 60 and older. Click on the Tax-Aide Site Locator ([www.aarp.org/money/taxaide/](http://www.aarp.org/money/taxaide/)) which will take you to the AARP site for information on locations and hours. Many sites will e-file your federal and Connecticut returns at no cost to you.
- Federal and State Tax Assistance from VITA—The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program offers free tax help for low-to moderate-income (under \$35,000) people who cannot prepare their own tax returns. Volunteers, sponsored by various organizations, receive training to help prepare basic tax returns in communities across the country. VITA sites are generally located at community and neighborhood centers, libraries, schools, shopping malls, and other convenient locations. Some locations also offer free electronic filing. If you need assistance from VITA, see the list of Connecticut VITA Sites. ([www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=107626,00.html](http://www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=107626,00.html)).

### **Road To Freedom Tour**

The Road to Freedom Tour, which will pass through Connecticut from October 14-16, is off and running. The Tour has already visited Pennsylvania, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, and Florida. The Tour is being coordinated nationally by the National Coalition for Disability Rights and ADA Watch. The Connecticut Disability Advocacy Collaborative is coordinating activities in Connecticut. To check out the highlights of the Tour to date, go to [www.roadtofreedom.wordpress.com](http://www.roadtofreedom.wordpress.com).

The Tour has been arranged as a response to a string of legal setbacks in the Courts, and is an effort to reclaim the civil rights protections for people with physical, mental, cognitive and developmental disabilities that we once thought were secure. A growing coalition of disability, civil rights and social justice organizations have united in the production of the Tour, which includes a traveling history exhibit and year long, cross-country bus tour to promote and strengthen the call for the most basic freedoms: access to public buildings, the opportunity to live independently, and the chance to work to support one's self and one's families. The tour stops will feature: a display highlighting the disability civil rights movement in America featuring narrative, photographs and artifacts; two highly visible and brightly wrapped buses; a team of experienced disability community leaders including photojournalist Tom Olin, whose images are central to our exhibit and whose work has been featured at the *Smithsonian*.

At each stop, the goal is to create a forum for people with disabilities and advocates to give personal testimonials about living life with a disability and the promises of the ADA – those kept and broken.

Stay Tuned!

### **ADA Restoration! Stories Needed!**

A number of national disability advocacy groups, including the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), in conjunction with the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD), which includes the Arc of the United States and United Cerebral Palsy, are looking for compelling, real-life stories of employment discrimination on the basis of disability to help make the case to Congress that the Supreme Court's narrow interpretations of the Americans with Disabilities Act have harmed people with disabilities in employment. Personal stories will be used in the coming weeks to educate members of Congress about the need for a legislative "fix" to the ADA in a way they can relate to and that can be readily understood.

What you can do? Send an email summary of your story, what happened, when it happened, and how it was resolved (if at all). Denials of reasonable accommodations, hiring discrimination, discriminatory firing and layoffs and harassment should do it. The need is urgent, so please send these stories ASAP! To send in your stories, or to obtain more information, contact: Anne C. Sommers, J.D., Policy Counsel, American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD), 202-457-0046 (V/TTY), 800-840-8844 (V/TTY) toll-free.

### **Challenge Grants Available**

Children need great outdoor places to play, and KaBoom! and Home Depot will make this happen for 140 communities across the United States in 2007 with their Challenge Grant program. Each grant provides \$5,000 which can be used towards the cost of building a new playground or refurbishing an existing field.

The next round of applications for both community-built play spaces and field refurbishment will be accepted until February 28, 2007. For more information and to download the application, visit [www.kaboom.org](http://www.kaboom.org) .

## **SABE Responds to Ashley Case**

Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE) responds to the Ashley case, a young girl who went through a series of medical procedures to stunt her growth and permanently keep her body the same size as a nine year-old:

“Self Advocates Becoming Empowered is the national self advocacy organization whose mission is : To ensure that people with disabilities are treated as equals and that they are given the same decisions, choices, rights, responsibilities, and chances to speak up to empower themselves; opportunities to make new friends; and to learn from their mistakes.

Self Advocates Becoming Empowered feel angry, sad, and outraged with the decision made by doctors, Ashley’s parents, hospital administrators and the American Medical Association that violated Ashley’s civil rights. SABE feels if Ashley did not have a disability this never would have happened. Just because someone has a disability does not mean they should be denied the basic human right to grow and mature as everyone else. The selfish actions taken by Ashley’s parents put other people with disabilities at risk of being denied their human and civil rights.

To all people with disabilities and people who believe in human rights, SABE calls you to action. Don’t let what happen to Ashley happen to others. We hold the medical profession accountable for not upholding their oath to do no harm.

For more information contact:

Julie Petty

479-409-3390

[peoplefirstark@yahoo.com](mailto:peoplefirstark@yahoo.com)”

## **No Medicare Part D Late Fee for Low-Income Enrollees**

The U.S Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) Acting Administrator Leslie V. Norwalk announced the elimination of the 2007 late enrollment penalty for any beneficiary eligible for the low income subsidy for a Part D plan even if they failed to sign up by the program’s initial deadline. For more information, call the Social Security Administration at 1-800-772-1213, or visit [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov) on the web. TTY users should call 1-800-325-0778.

## **Service Transformation: Without Exception**

The North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities is offering a unique opportunity to learn strategies to make available person-centered options to all people with disabilities without exception. The four day event will include presentations by eight organizations from throughout the country that routinely offer such options to each and every person they serve. The event will address the interests of people “who are tired of hearing excuses for not providing person-centered services to all people with developmental disabilities”, and asks the question “are you looking for solutions that will work in your community?”. The event begins on May 1 and will

run until lunch on May 4. It will be held at Asheville Renaissance Hotel in Asheville, North Carolina.

Individuals who are interested in attending or getting more information should contact Cathy Womack at 919-518-0963 or by e-mail at [cami@nc.rr.com](mailto:cami@nc.rr.com).

## **PBS Documentary Explores 200 Years of Life for Persons Who are Deaf**

"Through Deaf Eyes," a two-hour PBS documentary exploring nearly 200 years of Deaf life in America, will air nationally on PBS on Wednesday, March 21 at 9 p.m.ET (check local listings). The film was inspired by the exhibition, "History Through Deaf Eyes," curated by Jack R. Gannon of Gallaudet University.

The film presents the shared experiences of American history - family life, education, work, and community connections - from the perspective of deaf citizens. Interviews include community leaders, historians, and deaf Americans with diverse views on language use, technology and identity.

Poignant, sometimes humorous, these films draw on the media artists' own lives and are woven throughout the documentary. But the core of the film remains the larger story of life in America for a person who is deaf - a story of conflicts, prejudice and affirmation that reaches the heart of what it means to be human.

A comprehensive Web site, found at <http://www.pbs.org>, accompanies the film. The site includes interviews with the deaf filmmakers whose work is featured in the documentary, while also inviting viewers to submit their own stories, photographs, and films. These will become part of the archival collection of Gallaudet University. A companion book is being published by Gallaudet University Press.

## **Citizens with Mental Health Disabilities Fare Worse In Discrimination Lawsuits**

Sixteen years after Congress enacted the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), people with psychiatric disabilities are faring worse in court cases against employers for discrimination than are people with physical disabilities, researchers have found in a national study. People with psychiatric disabilities were less likely to receive a monetary award or job-related benefit. Psychiatric disabilities are among the most frequent disabilities cited by individuals who file ADA employment discrimination charges. In recent years, psychiatric disabilities have been cited in roughly 15% of the charges filed under the ADA each year. The National Institute of Mental Health funded the research, and the findings appear in the current issue (Volume 66, Issue 1) of the [Maryland Law Review](#). The researchers said the study is the first to examine how individuals with psychiatric disabilities fare in the court system. More findings:

- The researchers found that 37% of plaintiffs with psychiatric disabilities received a settlement from the defendant or a court ruling in their favor, compared with 49% of plaintiffs with physical disabilities.

- 19% of plaintiffs with psychiatric disabilities felt the presiding judge had treated both sides fairly, compared with 31% of plaintiffs with physical disabilities. 39% of plaintiffs with psychiatric disabilities felt they were treated respectfully during the legal process, compared with 52 percent of plaintiffs with physical disabilities.
- 19% of plaintiffs with psychiatric disabilities reported that they were satisfied with the overall experience of filing a lawsuit, compared with 36% of those with physical disabilities.

### **Promoting Wellness for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2007**

Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) has introduced the Promoting Wellness for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2007 to establish accessibility standards for medical diagnostic equipment and create wellness grants to fund health programs that focus on individuals with disabilities. In addition, the legislation would require medical and dental schools, along with their residency programs, to increase training to improve competency and clinical skills in providing care to people with a variety of disabilities. Senator Harkin has long been a friend of individuals with disabilities, and was a chief sponsor of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Individuals who have stories regarding medical access barriers they have experienced should send in their stories to Elizabeth Leef, Health Care Policy Analyst at the National Council for Independent Living at 1710 Rhode Island Ave, NW, 5th Floor Washington, DC 20036, or e-mail them at [Elizabeth@ncil.org](mailto:Elizabeth@ncil.org). If you have ever been denied diagnostic medical testing or ran into barriers while getting a mammogram, an x-ray, or getting on an examination table in a physicians office because of your disability, NCIL needs to know about it!

### **Work Opportunity Tax Credit has been Extended**

In December, Congress once again extended the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) through the end of this year. Along with the extension, Congress combined WOTC and the Welfare to Work Tax Credit, with this combination becoming effective January 1, 2007. The WOTC extension was for two years, with first year being retroactive to January 1, 2006 (the authority on this tax credit expired December 31, 2005.) Employers who hired eligible individuals during 2006 will now be able to claim the WOTC credit. And, employers can be guaranteed the credit for hires throughout 2007. For more information, go to [www.doleta.gov/business/Incentives/opptax/](http://www.doleta.gov/business/Incentives/opptax/).

### **EEOC Announces Initiative for Federal Hiring of Workers with Disabilities**

LEAD (Leadership for the Employment of Americans with Disabilities) is the new initiative of the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to address the declining number of employees with disabilities in the federal workforce. The Initiative includes educational seminars and focus group sessions with federal managers, hiring officials and others. For more information go to [www.eeoc.gov/initiatives/lead/index.html](http://www.eeoc.gov/initiatives/lead/index.html).

### **Discrimination for Workers with Disabilities Regardless of Productivity**

A recent chapter authored by two Arizona State University researchers and published in a new book (*Handbook on the Economics of Discrimination*) found that regardless of workplace productivity, people with disabilities earn less and are less likely to be employed than their non-disabled co-workers. The authors, Marjorie Baldwin and William Johnson, analyzed over a dozen studies and found wage gaps from zero to 21% between disabled and non-disabled workers. Differences in employment rates were as high as 25%. The study controlled for variables such as workers' on-the-job experience, education, and functional limitations, allowing workers matched in productivity to be analyzed. For more information go to <http://knowledge.wpcarey.asu.edu/index.cfm?fa=viewfeature&id=1349> .

## **EEOC Fact Sheet on Workers with Deafness and the ADA**

Individuals with hearing impairments can perform successfully on the job and should not be denied opportunities because of stereotypical assumptions about hearing loss. Some employers assume incorrectly that workers with hearing impairments will cause safety hazards, increase employment costs, or have difficulty communicating in fast-paced environments. In reality, with or without reasonable accommodation, individuals with hearing impairments can be effective and safe workers. The EEOC has issued a Fact Sheet on the rights of such workers under the ADA called: Questions and Answers about Deafness and Hearing Impairments in the Workplace and the Americans with Disabilities Act. For more information go to [www.eeoc.gov/facts/deafness.html](http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/deafness.html) .

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**If you want something to appear in the next edition please send it to us – [jjk1009@hotmail.com](mailto:jjk1009@hotmail.com) or [skoslosk03@comcast.net](mailto:skoslosk03@comcast.net) — or Jayne Kleinman, 55 Corrigan Ave., Meriden, CT 06451, 203-631-4800.**

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