

TASK FORCE TALK

BY JAMES SKOUFIS, CHAIR
N.Y.S. ASSEMBLY TASK FORCE
ON PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



I hope everyone is staying warm as we navigate our way through a bitter New York winter.

With the cold weather comes the state budget process. As I sit down to write this column, one week after Gov. Andrew Cuomo's State of the State message and a day into the first real week of the 2018 legislative session, I am very eager to roll up my sleeves and continue meeting with advocates to discuss the disability community's priorities.

In my new capacity as Task Force Chair, I am already well aware that there are a number of priorities that require being addressed through the state budget process, and I am eager to pitch in as much as my new position allows.

I have already begun receiving budget priority agendas from some of the key statewide disability advocacy organizations, which has been very helpful. Because I'm new to many of these issues, these agendas have given me the first glimpse of the hurdles that the disability community is facing.

I'm eager to receive more feedback and look forward to advocating for our priorities once the Governor's budget is released next week. I think we all realize that the fiscal climate of our state is going to require very prudent spending on all of our parts, but as Task Force Chair, I'm going to do all that I can to make sure the disability community has a voice when it comes to how 2018-2019 dollars are spent.

The disability community needs and deserves representation of its priorities at all levels of government, and I am ready to step up to the plate. I'm going to do all that I can to work toward adequate pay for home care workers, expand accessible and affordable housing and continue our push for a dedicated office at the agency level.

As I mentioned in my last column, you'll find that I approach my work in a very hands-on manner – my education on the disability community's needs will be ongoing. I have already adopted the "nothing about us without us" mantra!

That's why I encourage advocates to contact my office to set up meetings with myself and my staff in the coming weeks and months.

And as always, if you have any questions, comments or concerns please reach out to our Task Force office, 518 455-4592.