

National vs. Local Issues

PHIL BEDER
DIA MEMBER



According to Wikipedia, the job of an activist is to engage in “efforts to promote” and “make improvements in society.”

As disability rights activists, we often focus our efforts on what the government is doing because that’s the place where we can change society’s rules and regulations. National laws like Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, IDEA and the ADA have prohibited discrimination, set educational standards and guaranteed access for people with disabilities.

The federal government is currently considering several laws of interest to our community. National ADAPT is supporting the “Disability Integration Act,” also known as HR-2472.

This bill would compel states and local governments to provide community-based services and housing to people who want them and help people who are currently stuck in nursing homes.

There is another bill in Congress that would change the way wheelchairs and “complex rehabilitative” equipment is paid for. This bill, HR-3730, would make sure wheelchairs are properly setup and delivered by local suppliers who would be better suited to maintain and repair them. Long Island Rep. Lee Zeldin is the sponsor of this bill.

There are also lots of folks in this area who are concerned about a law being proposed in the House of Representatives that would undercut the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This Newspaper, *Able News*, has published several articles and columns that explained how HR-620 would greatly diminish our ability to correct ADA violations.

In addition, our national government is now sending signals, that they will seek to cut funding for important “social safety net” programs such as Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security in order to pay for the tax bill, passed at the end of last year. That tax “reform” legislation will permanently reduce corporate taxes by 43 percent and give tax breaks, primarily to the well off while temporarily giving small to moderate reductions to the middle class.

While all this activity at the national level is interesting and important, there is little we can do to effect federal policy. Most of the federal representatives in the N.Y. Metro area, already support disability issues.

It’s the representatives in Texas, Indiana and Wyoming who often support cutting social safety net programs and we cannot influence them. They, in general, do not listen to people who do not live in their district.

Activists must remember to invest their time and energy where they can and will be heard - on the state and local level. It is true that current federal policies will reduce the amount of money in New York’s treasury. We can however, pressure our state lawmakers to protect the programs and services important to the disability community.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s budget underfunds the home care and MLTC (Managed Long Term Care) programs that some disabled New Yorkers depend on. Independence Care (ICS) System is a MLTC with many clients who require 12 hours or more of personal assistance. On Feb. 2, the director of Independence Care System (ICS), Rick Surpin, announced that his program is on the edge of insolvency because of projected reductions in state funding.

Disabled New Yorkers need to ask the governor why he has vetoed a bill that would give tax breaks to homeowners who make accessible modifications and he has vetoed this bill for three straight years.

New York City residents need to keep pressure on the Mayor and Taxi & Limousine Commission to make sure that UBER and the other “online ride hail” services are as accessible as the yellow cabs. Disabled and non-disabled cab riders need to understand that UBER, with their unfair business practices toward their drivers and passengers could kill the taxi industry in the City.

As activists and advocates for disability rights, we have to keep our primary focus on local and state issues.

There are many challenges facing us in the coming year and our job now is to be informed, stay united and let our elected officials know who we are.