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Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY

From Susan Dooha, Executive Director

The Legislature and the Governor have finally come to an agreement on cuts to the state budget of nearly \$3 billion. We have yet to see all the details in the budget bills, but a look at the broad brush gives us an indication.

Most important...CIDNY staff and consumers led the campaign against \$11 million in cuts to SSI that would have devastated low-income elderly and people with disabilities. People with disabilities wrote, called, visited, and demonstrated. And, we have avoided those cuts for now.

We are also grateful that community-based agencies, like ours, that make the difference between people with disabilities living in the community rather than living in institutions, were spared for now.

We are deeply worried about the impact of other cuts, however. Programs that have been built over 30 years that help people with developmental disabilities or people who have mental health or drug and alcohol treatment needs suffered some of the biggest cuts. We don't think that cuts like these make sense, especially during a deep recession when people in crisis need this help.

We are worried about the future for our youth. The ladder out of poverty for people with disabilities – CUNY and SUNY – sustained cuts, and there were cuts to programs for children in Special Ed that help them maintain their functioning over the summer.

This is only the first round. We are looking at a new round of proposed cuts immediately in 2010. It seems like this struggle for survival of our most vulnerable will start all over again.

My deep gratitude to all the Board, Staff and Consumers who fought so hard.

Benefits Update

Starting on November 15th through December 31st, consumers who have Medicare but are not eligible for Medicaid, Extra Help or MSPs, can change their Medicare coverage. This happens only once a year, so now is the time to act. If your Medicare Part D plan doesn't cover some of your medications, or if you want to switch to a Medicare Advantage plan, we can help. Call CIDNY at 212 674-2300 and ask to speak to a Benefits Counselor. While you're at it, make sure you ask for a "Benefits Check Up" to see what else you might be eligible for. Do it before the end of the year and start the New Year off right.

Volunteer Spotlight

Native New Yorker Harriet Gershon has been volunteering for CIDNY since 2008. Born Harriet Welsher and raised in Brooklyn, she has been volunteering at various organizations since 2000.

Harriet was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1967, but the doctor told her father—and her father never told her! So she simply went on with her life, and fortunately was not bothered too much by symptoms until 1986. Her symptoms progressed and she started using mobility aids, first a cane, then a scooter. Eventually, she retired from her job as an office manager at a scarf manufacturer in December, 1999.

She needed something to do, so barely one month later, she started volunteering at the National Multiple Sclerosis Society New York chapter. There, she met several people connected with CIDNY and decided she would like to be involved with us. Harriet helps with our monthly mailings and performs other office assistance.

In addition to her current volunteer work at CIDNY and the MS Society, Harriet has also volunteered at the MS Care Center at NYU-Hospital for Joint Diseases and for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. Harriet and her husband Yehuda have one daughter, Bonnie, who is an attorney here in NYC.



CIDNY Quick Take



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CIDNY Volunteers Take Action on State Budget

Since late October, the Governor and the State Legislature have been trying to decide how to close a \$3.2 billion budget gap in this year's state budget. Many of their ideas would hurt people with disabilities.

Volunteers from CIDNY's Consumer Action Network (CAN) have been working hard to convince the government to avoid harmful budget cuts, such as an \$11 million reduction to Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits, \$221,000 from independent living centers like CIDNY, and the elimination of vital Medicaid services.

Volunteers and staff have been to two rallies and two budget hearings, half of them in Albany. We have given testimony, chanted, held up signs, and generally made ourselves heard at these events. CAN members, staff, and other CIDNY supporters have made dozens of telephone calls and sent many emails to the Governor and Legislators opposing unwise budget cuts.

Now that this year's budget gap is filled, we await the Governor's proposal for next year's budget, probably in January, probably containing more problematic funding cuts. Fortunately, CAN volunteers have built some momentum and are more prepared than ever for the upcoming challenges.

If you would like to be involved in fighting budget cuts that hurt our community, contact Lourdes Rosa-Carrasquillo at 646-442-4148, or at can@cidny.org.

Health Care Reform and the Drug Coverage Gap

The House of Representatives passed health care reform legislation and the Senate is now debating their bill, the "Patient Protection and Affordable Health Care Act". The Senate bill does not go as far as the House bill in closing the coverage gap in Medicare Part D. The Senate bill provides a 50 percent discount on

brand name drugs for people falling into the Medicare Part D coverage gap, known as the "doughnut hole," where the insured person has to begin paying for their own drugs by themselves. The Senate bill provides for an increase of \$500 in Part D coverage before beneficiaries reach that gap. This is a good first step on drug coverage reform, but the bill needs to go farther and completely close the doughnut hole, as the House bill does by eliminating the gap completely by 2019.

Once the Senate bill is passed, hopefully by the end of the month, Senate conferees will meet with their House counterparts to resolve the differences and a bill will go to the President for his signature. Let's hope that the final bill closes the drug coverage gap.

Volunteers Survey Poll Sites

On November 3rd, CIDNY conducted its annual Election Day survey of poll sites for accessibility. Joined by the Multiple Sclerosis Society and the Self-Advocacy Association of NYS, CIDNY consumers, volunteers and staff visited 51 poll sites in Manhattan and Queens. Only 9 did not have any barriers according to the Americans

with Disabilities Act Guidelines for Polling Places. To receive a copy of the report, which will be available in December, contact Rima McCoy at rmccoy@cidny.org or at 646-442-4146.

Holiday Season Event in Queens

Every weekend until January 3rd you can take the kids, grandkids, or the youngster within to the "winter wonderland events" at the New York Hall of Science in Flushing Meadows Corona Park. Activities include seeing what you would look like as a snowman on a projected screen, experiencing a motion simulator ride through glaciers, winter crafts workshops and an opportunity to make your own unique crystal inspired kaleidoscope to take home. For more information call (718) 699-0005.

If you would like updates on this issue, contact Heidi Siegfried at hsiegfried@cidny.org.

