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Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY

STEP UP MEETING

On February 25, 2010 from 6:30-8:00 pm CIDNY's Youth Program, STEP UP, and the ARISE Coalition will be hosting a Forum for parents of students with disabilities attending public school.

If your child has an IEP and you are frustrated with the education or services your child is receiving; if you are experiencing problems with transportation and busing; or you disagree with your child's *IEP*, we want to hear from you. If you student is lucky not to be having those problems but you have other concerns or comments, we want to hear from you too. This will be an opportunity to speak freely, and meet advocates and other parents that share your concerns. We can all work together to improve the lives and education of students with disabilities in the public school system.

This meeting is open to all parents in Lower Manhattan with children in Special Education /District 75 that are attending public school in NYC. Please join us at Grand street Settlement -80 Pitt Street, NY, NY 10002 and invite your neighbors whose children are in the same program.

If you would like to attend please call Alida Rodriguez -646-442-1516 or email arodriguez@cidny.org

Will "Cadillac" Health Plans continue to be the dependable "cars" that people with serious illnesses and Disabilities need?

This month CIDNY's urged consumers and advocates to contact government decision makers about the tax on "Cadillac" Health Plans being included in federal health reform legislation. "Cadillac" Health Plans are comprehensive job-

based health policies that are particularly important to people with serious illnesses and disabilities and include coverage for things like physical therapy and wheelchairs. The President said this tax is a way to put downward pressure on premiums. He's right. To avoid the tax, recent surveys of employers tell us that 87 percent would reduce comprehensive benefits, leaving many without adequate coverage. And we are concerned that the types of benefits that people with disabilities and serious illnesses depend upon to keep working may be the first things to go.

It appears that the tax to employers will apply to plans that cost at least \$8500 a year for individual policies and \$24,000 for family policies with adjustments for high cost states (like NY), high risk-industries and occupations, geography, age and gender. CIDNY will continue to monitor employer health coverage to see how the implementation of these thresholds affects the coverage offered.

A New Way to Vote

Its official! New Yorkers will vote in a new way beginning with the fall elections. On January 5th the NYC Board of Elections (NYC BOE) chose to replace the old lever machines with an optical scanner that will count paper ballots. Paper ballots can be marked by hand with a pen or with the same accessible Ballot Marking Device (BMD) that has been in NYC's poll sites during the last several elections. When BMD marked ballots are entered into the optical scanner along with hand marked ballots, concerns voters had in previous elections about whether BMD ballots are really being counted and whether they are private will no longer be issues. Public Advocate Bill De Blasio is urging the NYC BOE to work with the disability, immigrant and elderly communities to ensure that everyone understands the new changes in voting. Perhaps spurred by the Public Advocate's message





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and CIDNY's advocacy, the NYC BOE met with CIDNY on January 8th to discuss ways to inform people with visual disabilities. If you have questions about the changes in voting, contact Rima McCoy at 646-442-4146 or rmccoy@cidny.org.

Access-A-Ride Threatened by MTA Budget Gap

Last December, the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) adopted a Doomsday budget, bringing back last year's threats to cut subway and bus services. They added a vague warning that they will "re-examine" their responsibilities under the ADA to provide paratransit services. One idea the MTA floated is for Access-A-Ride to drop some riders off at bus or subway stops, instead of taking them all the way. Another is to tighten eligibility requirements for Access-A-Ride.

CIDNY attended a December press conference called by Assembly Member Micah Kellner and Senator Thomas Duane, at which Kellner called for the MTA to avoid cutting Access-A-Ride services by carrying out his proposal to increase the number of paratransit trips using cars rather than vans. Kellner estimates that the MTA could save \$50 million a year by doing so.

In January, CIDNY attended a second press conference at which City Council Speaker Christine Quinn spoke out against all the cuts, followed by disability advocates, students, and others opposing specific parts of the Doomsday budget. The next day, the MTA announced it would probably continue giving students free Metrocards, and it is revising some of its proposed cuts. As of this writing, there has been no decision regarding changes to Access-A-Ride service. For information

too close to the footer? on how you might get involved, contact Linda Ostreicher at lostreicher@cidny.org.

Around Town

Join the Central Park Conservancy for the **Harlem Meer Social Hour**, a fresh alternative to the tired old happy hour scene. The free monthly series for adults takes place from 6:30pm to 8:00pm at the Charles A. Dana Discovery Center, Central Park (located inside the Park at 110th Street between Fifth and Lenox Avenues) Manhattan. Coming up this winter are two nights of Winter Star Gazing on January 21st and February 18th: telescopes and refreshments are

provided along with plenty of time for mingling. Advance registration **not** required. For more information, call (212) 860-1370.

Section 8: Use It or Lose It

In previous years, CIDNY was able to assist individuals with mobility impairments, blindness and other disabilities look for an apartment by helping

them get extensions so they would have more time to find an affordable and accessible apartment. That time flexibility has changed due to budget cuts. Now, if you don't find a place before the written deadline on your voucher you will lose your rental subsidy. So if you have a Section 8 Voucher, you may have to be more flexible about where you live. Since Manhattan is the most difficult borough in which to use a Voucher – think about other boroughs. For more information on the Section 8 Voucher and apartment search tips, call CIDNY at 212-674-2300 or access@cidny.org.

