

Governmental Affairs Update

The Legislature recently passed four pieces of legislation impacting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) that now await action by the Governor. These bills include:

- A4608/S3099 which provides for the regulation and licensing of applied behavior analysts
- S4139/A5751 which allocates \$250,000 to the Rutgers School of Dental Medicine to help address the shortage of special-needs dentists who serve patients with physical disabilities and behavioral challenges.
- A2705/S484 which revises the State's newborn screening program and establishes a Newborn Screening Advisory Review Committee which would be authorized to make recommendations on the disorders to be screened for by the Department of Health, as well as on screening technologies, treatment options, and educational and follow-up procedures, to be used in the State's newborn screening program.
- S4141/A6011 which authorizes a parent or guardian to request the use of an individualized health care plan for a student with epilepsy or a seizure disorder.

With the legislative session ending in mid-January, the Governor can take action on these bills by signing them into law, vetoing them or choosing neither option and allowing them to expire when the session ends which is called a pocket veto.

Also last month, The Arc of New Jersey testified before the Assembly Labor Committee in support of A5105 which establishes a Task Force on Maximizing Employment for People with Disabilities. The Arc of New Jersey is a named member of the Task Force which is charged with studying and making recommendations to the Governor and Legislature regarding the problem of unemployment and underemployment among individuals with disabilities in the State. The bill passed out of Assembly Labor and this past spring was approved by the full Senate.

In addition to our legislative advocacy at the State House, The Arc of New Jersey continues to push for funding in the FY21 Budget to increase wages for the Direct Support Professional workforce. Toward that end, we testified on this issue at the Department of Human Services Budget Listening Session on December 4. Our testimony centered on the need to index DSP wages against the scheduled minimum wage increases so that salaries for this workforce go up every time minimum wage goes up and thus stay ahead of what entry-level workers will receive from private businesses. We also spoke about other funding needs affecting people with I/DD including medical and behavioral supports in the community and day programs.

Finally, local County Chapters of The Arc enjoyed visits from Senate President Steve Sweeney during the month of December. The Senate President spent time touring The Arc of Essex County's Stepping Stones School in Roseland, and earlier in the month, he visited with individuals served by The Arc Mercer at their annual Bowling Party. It is always great to show off the excellent programs and services offered by the Chapters to the leader of the New Jersey State Senate.