



## Advocates want to amend NJ Constitution and State Statute



*“This constitutional amendment acknowledges that individuals with cognitive or emotional disabilities may otherwise be capable of making decisions in the voting booth and that their right of self-determination should be respected and protected in this regard.”*

—NJ SENATE PRESS RELEASE

The New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities, through its grassroots Monday Morning Project, wants to amend wording in the state’s constitution and statute that is offensive to people with intellectual disabilities and people with emotional disabilities.

At issue is Article II, Section I, regarding elections and voting. Paragraph six of the section states that, “No idiot or insane person shall enjoy the right of suffrage.” The same phrase appears in Title 19:4-1 of the State Statute.

In response, Senate President Richard J. Codey (D-Essex) has introduced measures (SCR-134 and S-2476) that would erase that language, which was adopted in 1789. The legislation was drafted by Monday Morning in conjunction with the Department of the Public Advocate, the Office of Legislative Services and Sen. Codey’s office.

“This is yet another big step towards removing the stigma of mental illness,” said Sen. Codey. “We must bring mental health into the new century. The fact that this language has remained in our constitution for so long is a disgrace. Not only is it insensitive, but it does not

take into account the individual circumstances of people with varying degrees of disabilities.”

In 1976, the Appellate Division of the Superior Court of New Jersey declared that the words “idiot” and “insane” were outdated and offensive and no longer had any legal meaning. Instead, the court declared that an individual’s constitutional right to vote may only be denied by an individualized and specific decision by a court.

The offensive language would be replaced by the phrase “*person who has been adjudicated by a court of competent jurisdiction to lack the capacity to understand the act of voting,*” in describing those persons who shall be denied the right to vote.

“The Monday Morning Project and its networks have been working very hard in registering over 18,000 voters with disabilities as well as educating them in all other aspects of the election process,” said Anita Clavering, facilitator of the Middlesex County Monday Morning Network. “I am happy that Senator Codey is now fighting to remove this outmoded language from the State Constitution, which not only is offensive and archaic, it does

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## Monday Morning Youth

The Monday Morning Project is a statewide, grassroots advocacy project made up of people with disabilities and their families. Established in 1995, the project has grown to over 1500 members. While Monday Morning continues to make significant accomplishments, we have observed that most of the membership is over the age of 30. Younger members have expressed the need for a group that addresses the concerns of young adults with disabilities.

Therefore, we would like to develop Monday Morning Y2 (Monday Morning Youth 2) for young adults age 18 to 30.

The first year of the project will implement a young adult advocacy/leadership curriculum. The trainings will encompass building comprehensive advocacy, self-determination, and leadership skills for youth with disabilities, specifically youth with developmental disabilities. The trainings are intended to develop advocacy and leadership skills for youth who are committed to facilitating inclusion and systems change.

Outreach by NJCDD staff and identified team leaders will be ongoing throughout the first year including a focus on young adults receiving services from the Division of Developmental Disabilities and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

The second year of the project will establish grassroots youth activist teams throughout the state. Each team will have two youth facilitators. These teams will develop and implement advocacy efforts on a local, state and national level. The groups will also implement community projects that promote awareness and collaboration with non-disability groups in their community. Teams will be led by two facilitators, youth driven, and facilitate empowerment, giving youth a voice in their communities and the political process. Continued training and support will be given by NJCDD staff.

For more information, contact Carole Tonks, 609.292.3453, or [carole.tonks@njddc.org](mailto:carole.tonks@njddc.org).



## NJCDD New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities

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*NJCDD's Monday Morning* is a compilation of news from various sources, organized to inform people with disabilities about policies, programs, laws, trainings and events. The purpose of the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities is to apply its unique resources for culturally competent advocacy, capacity building and systemic change activity, to build leadership in self-advocates and their families, and to assure that individuals with developmental disabilities and their families are full participants in the design of and have access to needed community services, individual supports, and other forms of assistance that support self-determination, independence, productivity, integration and inclusion in all facets of community life.

# Constitutional amendment

(continued from page 1)

not recognize voters with disabilities as individuals who want to exercise the important rights we have to vote in all elections.”

If the amendment is passed by both legislative houses, it would be placed on the November statewide ballot.

As we go to press, SCR-134 and S-2476 were passed unanimously by the Senate State Government Committee at a public hearing at the State House Annex on January 29th. All committee members signed on as co-sponsors.

*Monday Morning* will continue to follow this issue and will keep readers aware, through this publication and the Council's website, of new developments and planned activities. For information contact Monday Morning coordinator Luke Koppisch, 609.777.3293.

## 2007 Inclusive Education Fellowship nomination forms available online

The New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities is seeking nominations for its 2007 Fellowship Program in Inclusive Education. The deadline for nominations has been extended to February 28th.

The Fellowship Program was created to encourage, acknowledge and expand promising practices in including children with disabilities in all aspects of the public education system. Any individual or group

of individuals who encourage the inclusion of students with disabilities in all areas of school life, including academic and non-academic activities, are eligible. Nominees must demonstrate how the fellowship will be used to incorporate and/or expand their ideas into everyday practice.

After a screening process, selected nominees will be required to complete an application and interview process. Nominees will be required to identify a practice or concept they would like to expand, develop or implement and discuss how the fellowship will be utilized to do so. Up to 10 fellowships of \$1000 will be awarded. Nominees must demonstrate a commitment to the identified practice or concept. The utilization of fellowship awards must be explicitly described. Fellows will be required to participate in an activity to publicize the selected fellowship activities in early summer. Self nominations are not permitted. Past years' winners may not apply for the same practice.

Nominations describing segregated services within the general education setting or in segregated settings will not be considered.

Printable nomination forms are available online at [www.njcdd.org/fellowship.htm](http://www.njcdd.org/fellowship.htm)

## *Gains have been made in general classrooms*

Students with cognitive disabilities are far more likely to be educated alongside typical students than they were 20

years ago, a University of Florida study has found.

But a student's geographic location, rather than the severity of his disability, often determines how he will spend his school days, according to the report. Various states have widely different policies on who can be identified as having cognitive disabilities, and how they are educated.

A handful of states such as Idaho, Kansas, Minnesota, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota and Vermont accounted for much of the gain seen nationwide, with many other states making little or no progress.

## Benefits to Work

If you are now receiving disability benefits, going to work doesn't necessarily mean that you will lose your income and health coverage.

Disability Benefits 101 New Jersey has developed the Benefits to Work Calculator as a tool that will show how a person's Social Security SSI or SSDI benefits might change if they took a job. It is designed for job seekers age 18 to 65.

The calculator can estimate whether the person would be better off financially, could receive or maintain health coverage and if there are other programs that could assist them.

Access the calculator at: <http://preview-nj.disabilitybenefits101.org/planning/>

# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

## February

**24**

2007 South Jersey Possibilities Conference on Autism and Developmental Disabilities  
"Creating Awareness, Inclusion & Independence"  
Atlantic Cape Community College Theater, Mays Landing, NJ  
[www.facesautismsupport.org](http://www.facesautismsupport.org)

## March

**3**

"Making the Move: Life After High School"  
Our House  
76 Floral Avenue, Murray Hill, NJ 07974  
8 AM to 2:30 PM  
[www.ourhousenj.org](http://www.ourhousenj.org)

## March

**9**

The NJ Center for Outreach and Services for the Autism Community (COSAC), Autism Workshop  
"Using Skinner's Analysis of Verbal Behavior to Analyze Language"  
8:30 AM to 3:30 PM  
Crown Plaza in Monroe (NJ Turnpike, Exit 8A)  
\$100.  
Register online at [www.njcosac.org](http://www.njcosac.org)

**29&30**

NJ APSE - The Network on Employment and The Boggs Center  
Woodbridge Hilton, Iselin, NJ  
Registration Contact:  
[wendy.kuziemski@umdnj.edu](mailto:wendy.kuziemski@umdnj.edu)

## March

**31**

"Building Inclusive Communities"  
New Jersey Inclusive Child Care Project Annual Conference  
Crown Plaza in Monroe (NJ Turnpike, Exit 8A)  
Contact: Denise Bouyer, 973.642.8100 ext.108

## April

**19**

"Equal Justice"  
Developmentally Disabled Offenders Program of The Arc of New Jersey  
<http://www.arcnj.org/>



## What are you thinking?

What is the most important disability issue in your life right now? Housing? Employment? Transportation? Personal safety? The New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities is interested to know your thoughts and opinions. Please take a few minutes to complete our online survey. Its easy and its confidential. Log onto our website at [www.njddc.org](http://www.njddc.org) and scroll down the home page to the survey link.