

**Learning Disabilities Association of New York State
Learning Disabilities Association of Long Island**

**Testimony to the
Suffolk County Legislature**

February 3, 2009

**In Support of
A Local Law Establishing
The Toxic Free Toddler and Babies Act**

**and Support for the Long Island
Centers of Excellence in Children's Environmental Health**

On behalf of the Learning Disabilities Association of Long Island and the Learning Disabilities Association of New York State, we state our support for legislation that would reduce children's exposure to Bisphenol A (BPA). BPA is a synthetic chemical found in many commonly available plastic items, including baby bottles and children's cups, water bottles etc. BPA is known to leach out of containers used for food and drink, entering the substance in the container and then consumed by the child drinking or eating from plastic container. Yet, studies have shown that even very low doses of BPA present a potential health risk to children, including the development of learning and other developmental disabilities. We therefore support the Suffolk County Legislature's action to ban children's beverage containers that contain BPA. Learning and developmental disabilities present lifelong challenges to affected individuals and their families.

In order to understand why this action to prevent learning disabilities is so important, we would like to take this opportunity to explain about learning disabilities and their impact on Long Island.

Facts about Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities impede the ability to store, process or produce information. People with learning disabilities have trouble learning because their minds process words or information differently. Learning disabilities can affect the ability to read, write, speak, or complete math and can impair one's ability to build social relationships. Often this results in a lack of competitive employment and/or successful independent living.

Deficits in basic reading skills are the most common and often the most debilitating forms of learning disabilities. Eighty to eighty-five percent of students with learning disabilities who receive special education and related services have their basic deficits in language and reading.

Learning disabilities can occur along with, and be complicated by, problems in attention and the development of social skills. Some studies suggest that the co-existing rate of learning disabilities and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is as high as 50 percent.

1 out of 7 Americans have some type of a learning disability.

The Impact of Learning and Developmental Disabilities

The incidence of learning and developmental disabilities are rising, some dramatically so, now affecting about one in six children in the U.S. The impact of learning disability on federal, state and local budgets is enormous. The impact on the affected individuals, their families and communities are incalculable. The scope of the problem is experienced in a number of ways:¹

In Education:

- According to the New York State Education Department, nearly 25,000 Nassau and Suffolk school children are identified as having a learning disability, the second largest population of students with learning disabilities in all of New York State, second only to New York City. This does not include children who have not yet been identified.
- 51% of students receiving special education services through the public schools are identified as having learning disabilities.
- Children with learning disabilities or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) compose between 10% - 15% of the school-age population and represent over half the children who receive special education services in the United States.
- Specific learning disabilities have increased 22% over the past 25 years. In the past decade, the number of students ages six to 21 years identified with specific learning disabilities has increased by 38%.
- 35% of children with learning disabilities drop out of high school. This is twice the rate of students without LD.
- Only 13% of students with learning disabilities (compared to 53% of students in general population) have attended a 4-year post-secondary school program within two years of leaving high school.
- Two-thirds of high school graduates with learning disabilities were rated "not qualified" to enter a four-year college, compared to 37% of non-disabled graduates.

In Society:

- Up to 60% of adolescents in treatment for substance abuse have learning disabilities.
- 62% of students with learning disabilities were unemployed one year after graduating.
- 48% of all with learning disabilities are out of the workforce or unemployed.
- 50% of females with learning disabilities will be mothers (many of them single) within 3-5 years of leaving high school.
- 44 percent of the TANF (welfare) population were found to have a learning disability.
- Learning disabilities and substance abuse are the most common impediments to keeping welfare clients from becoming and remaining employed.
- 31% of students with learning disabilities will be arrested 3-5 years out of high school.
- 50% of juvenile delinquents tested were found to have undetected learning disabilities.

While the mission of the Learning Disabilities Associations involves support and advocacy for persons with learning disabilities and their families, we also work to prevent learning disabilities. We work to raise awareness of the impact of learning disabilities on our community and society, and to offer our support for initiatives that will help prevent learning disabilities in future generations. We therefore support the Suffolk County Legislature's action to ban children's beverage containers that contain BPA.

We also wish to take this opportunity to urge the Suffolk County leadership to support the continued funding of the **Centers of Excellence for Children's Environmental Health**. Two out of eight New

¹ Assembled data from various sources available from LDANYS

York State funded Centers are in Suffolk County, in both Huntington and Stony Brook. Thanks to the exemplary leadership of several Long Island Legislators in our State Legislature, including Assemblyman Robert Sweeney, State Senator Carl Marcellino, and former Assemblyman, now State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli, Long Island has a unique and extremely valuable resource with its Children's Environmental Health Centers. These Centers of Excellence:

- Routinely screen all young children for blood lead levels;
- Increase the accuracy of diagnosis of children's diseases caused by environmental factors;
- Improve the treatment of children's diseases caused by environmental factors;
- Prevent diseases caused by environmental factors;
- Better quantify and describe the burden in the state of children's diseases of environmental origin; and
- Strengthen and expand educational programs in children's environmental health for families and professionals at all levels.

The Learning Disabilities Association of New York State has long supported the development of these centers. Unfortunately, Governor Paterson has moved to cut all funds for these centers. It is now up to the State Legislature to restore their funding. We therefore urge that the Suffolk County Leadership do all it can to support and continue to fund the Children's Environmental Centers. For you information, we have attached a recent Fact Sheet regarding these Centers.

Thank you for this opportunity to present our support for your efforts to protect children from the dangers of BPA, and to voice our support for the Children's Environmental Health Centers.

The Learning Disabilities Association of Long Island (LDA-LI) is a Chapter of the Learning Disabilities Association of New York State. We are families and professionals who are concerned about the critical need for greater attention, resources and services for persons with Learning Disabilities in Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Our work as a Chapter begins with our recognition of the startling and growing number of Long Islanders with learning disabilities, and the need to provide meaningful them and their families meaningful information, and support.

The Learning Disabilities Association of New York State LDANYS is a statewide 501(c)3 membership association of families, professionals and service organizations, now in its 50th year of advocacy on behalf of persons with learning disabilities and their families. Their mission is to work collaboratively with individuals, families and the community through a network of regional affiliates to empower and enable children and adults with learning and other developmental disabilities to lead independent, productive and fulfilling lives. LDANYS has a statewide membership base and affiliate chapters in eight regions of the state. LDANYS also has strong relationships with other state based disability advocacy organizations, and is the New York State affiliate of the LDA of America.