

**Learning Disabilities Association of New York State**

**Testimony to the**

**Schenectady County Legislature**

**May 14, 2009**

**In Support of**

**A Resolution to enact a Local Law Establishing the Protection of Toddlers and  
Babies Act.**

I am Stephen Boese, Executive Director of the Learning Disabilities Association of New York State, and also a 20-year resident of the city of Schenectady. Thank you for providing us this opportunity to speak with you this evening regarding an issue of great importance to the children and families of Schenectady.

On behalf of the Learning Disabilities Association of New York State, we state our support for legislation that would reduce children's exposure to Bisphenol A (BPA). Bisphenol-A (BPA) was created long ago in the late nineteenth century and is now used primarily as a strengthener in polycarbonate plastics. It is found in many products, common in the environment, and in fact, trace amounts are common inside most of us, as confirmed by several bio-monitoring studies. While widely used it has been shown to cause many developmental disorders, such as learning and other developmental disabilities. Concerns over BPA's adverse effects on human health has recently led Canada to deem it potentially harmful and ban selling plastic baby bottles containing the compound. The City of Chicago, the State of Minnesota and New York State's Suffolk County have also enacted similar laws, while the US Congress and the NYS Legislature are also now considering similar laws. A few large retailers, including Wal-Mart, Toys R Us and CVS have begun phasing out products that contain BPA.

BPA is a chemical found in many commonly available plastic items, including those used by babies and very young children such as 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. In addition, young children will commonly chew or mouth these plastics, also leading to ingestion of the chemical. 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 Schenectady County Legislature's action to ban children's beverage containers that contain BPA.

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.

### *Facts about Learning Disabilities*

A learning disability is a life-long neurobiological disorder that affects the manner in which individuals select, retain and express information. Incoming or outgoing information may become scrambled as it travels between the senses and the brain. In many cases, learning disabilities interfere with the development and use of language and the ability to speak, read, write, spell or perform math calculations. Learning disabilities affect an individual's self-esteem, education, vocation, socialization and daily living activities.

Learning and developmental disabilities present lifelong challenges to affected individuals and their families. Learning disabilities are "hidden" disabilities meaning you cannot look at a person and "see" that they have a disability. 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.

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.

Learning disabilities are life-long. They are not outgrown and they do not disappear when a child becomes an adult or leaves school. There is no "cure" for learning disabilities and learning disabilities cannot be treated with medication in the way ADHD can.

The largest preventable cause of Learning Disabilities is exposure to environmental toxins.

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:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Assembled data from various sources available from LDANYS

**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 (most 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% or more of juvenile delinquents tested were found to have learning disabilities, while nearly half of the inmates in adult correctional facilities have learning disabilities.

**In Education:**

- 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.
- 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.

- 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%.

Sadly, we are seeing an enormous increase in the incidence of learning disabilities (and other developmental disabilities such as autism), while at the same time, we have seen an enormous increase in the number of largely unregulated chemicals in commerce, the environment, and our every day products. While the mission of the Learning Disabilities Associations focuses on 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 Schenectady County Legislature's action to ban children's beverage containers that contain BPA and thank you for this opportunity to present our views.

*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 50<sup>th</sup> 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.*