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MEMO IN SUPPORT

June 11, 2009

A.7566 P. Rivera/S.3483 Huntley, An act to amend the mental hygiene law, in relation to changing the name of the office of mental retardation and developmental disabilities to the New York state developmental disabilities services office

PASSED SENATE/UNDER CONSIDERATION BY THE ASSEMBLY WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

This bill would amend the Mental Hygiene Law to change the name of the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities to the New York State Developmental Disabilities Services Office and would make a technical correction to the Mental Hygiene Law.

The name change provided for by this bill reflects the growing consensus among professionals and consumer advocacy groups that the use of person centered language is important when referring to persons with disabilities, including persons who have developmental disabilities. This name change would clarify that the agency serves persons with all types of developmental disabilities and conditions, not just those with mental retardation.

A learning disability is a neurobiological disorder, meaning there are differences in brain structure and/ or function in a person who has learning disabilities. These differences lead to difficulty in learning and often to difficulties in coping with the challenges and stresses of everyday life. One in seven New Yorkers has a Learning Disability.

The impact of learning disabilities on our society and culture is enormous. Over half of the detainees in juvenile detention facilities have a learning disability. Up to 60% of adolescents in treatment for substance abuse have learning disabilities. 48% of those 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. 31% of students with learning disabilities will be arrested 3-5 years out of high school.

This legislation, once enacted, will benefit persons with learning and other developmental disabilities by providing a more dignified and appropriate name for the State agency responsible for facilitating necessary supports and services.

The Learning Disabilities Association of New York State therefore supports this bill, and urges that it be enacted into law.