

SEIU LOCAL 509, A.E.I. CHEER NAME CHANGE FOR DMR (6-9-06)

Local 509 SEIU

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With two successful votes in the past week, a movement is afoot to advance the rights of persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Yesterday the Joint Committee on Children and Families gave a favorable report to H.B. 2870, which would change the name of the Department of Mental Retardation to the Department of Developmental Disabilities.

According to Michael Grunko, President of SEIU Local 509, the Massachusetts union of human service workers, "It is a matter of justice and dignity that this bill becomes law. Words and labels have real meaning and real impact."

Buddy Bostick, the director of A.E.I. Community Support Services, noted that the American Association of Mental Retardation decided this week to change its name to the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (A.A.I.D.D.). Bostick believes "this is great news for individuals who are developmentally disabled and seeking respect and dignity.

"I am so happy with this name change," said Bostick. "Now we must change the name of our own Department of Mental Retardation."

Forty states have already changed the name of their agencies serving people with developmental disabilities. Says Grunko, "Massachusetts should join A.A.I.D.D. and those forty other states for the sake of justice, fairness, dignity, and respect of self advocates and their families."

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A Short History:
Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong (MASS)
And Changing the Name of DMR

Since its early beginnings as the Steering Committee for a future state-wide self-advocacy organization in 1996 to becoming Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong (MASS), self-advocates had Changing the Name of the Department of Mental Retardation as their top issue. It was always about respect and dignity and not being stigmatized.

The primary goals of the movement were to be heard, taken seriously and what the name should be. MASS worked to increase membership, build local self-advocacy groups and create coalitions to effect the Change. Members educated their legislators on the negative connotation of "department of mental retardation" and that it should be changed.

Finally in 2007, Massachusetts Representative Michael Costello, on behalf of self-advocates, filed the first bill to Change the Name and we were on our way. It was agreed that the name should be about service not disability, thus the name Department of Developmental Services.

Historically, names or labels reflect the societal perception and value of individuals. More than a hundred and fifty years ago, the Fernald Developmental Center was founded for "idiots and imbeciles". In the 20th Century, a parent lead organization, Association for Retarded Children (ARC) was established; its title suggesting the level of expectations at that time.

Today, organizations from the United Nations to the President's Commission are changing the terminology to discontinuing the use of negative labels. More than eighty percent of the states and territories have replaced "mental retardation" with different term in describing its state agency serving individuals with intellectual disabilities. And, in Massachusetts, on June 30, 2009, DMR will officially become the Department of Developmental Services.

Senator Spilka moves that the bill be amended by striking out all after the enacting clause and inserting in place thereof the following:

“There is hereby established a special commission to study the appropriateness of changing the title of the Department of Mental Retardation, established in chapter 19B of the general laws. The commission shall consider the impact of the existing department name on the individuals served; new names for the department, including but not limited to the department of developmental services, and the likely effect of each new name considered on the individuals served and on the definition of the population for whom the department should provide funding and services.

The commission shall consist of the chairs of the joint legislative committee on children and families or their designees, one additional senate member and one additional house member of said committee, the commissioner of the department of mental retardation, secretary of the executive office of health and human services, 2 persons receiving services from the department, a representative of the Massachusetts Chapter of the Association for Retarded Citizens, a representative of SEIU, local 509, a representative of the Association of Development Disability Providers and 2 representatives of organizations which advocate for persons served by the department and their families. The two chairs of the committee on children and families or their designees shall co-chair the commission. The commission shall file a report of its findings together with any recommendations for a change in the name of the department with the committee on children and families and with the clerk of the house of representatives and the clerk of the senate not later than November 30, 2006”