

RI DISABILITY VOTE PROJECT

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Participate, Vote, Succeed

Disability Vote Action: The Email Newsletter of the RI Disability Vote Project

April 13th, 2007

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Dear Friend,

Greetings! This is the eighth email newsletter of the Rhode Island Disability Vote Project. This newsletter contains updates about the Project, notices about local disability events, and action alerts either sponsored by the Rhode Island Disability Vote Project or referred to us by other disability organizations. If you would not like to receive this email newsletter, or if you know of someone else who would like to be added to the list, please email Lee Strauss. Her email address is **ampersand1@cox.net**. Please email Project Organizer James deBoer if you have items that you would like to submit for future newsletters.

Convention Report

Thank you very, very much, to everyone who came and participated last week to make our convention a real success! We're very proud of all the hard work we accomplished together on April 4th. Special thanks to our convention planning committee, our facilitators, our co-sponsors, the Board of Elections, the Warwick Public Library, and everyone who helped out with technology, photography, or straightening up the food room on the day of the convention. Thank you also to Seth Hamilton, who is helping with our web development at www.cpnri.org/html/ridvp_home.html (site still under construction).

One hundred people including representatives from almost all of our member organizations came together to discuss how the Rhode Island Disability Vote Project can be most effective in the areas of outreach, fundraising, recruitment, making voting easier, and getting people to register and vote. Attached and below, you'll find the final recommendations that came out of each break-out group.

We also approved the budget and the dues plan for 2008, and the by-laws passed by a unanimous vote. Member organizations will be receiving these documents again in the mail in the near future. Please feel free to contact the organizer or a member of the Steering Committee if you have any questions. Also, please fill out the attached evaluation form if you didn't do so on the 4th.

The other important thing that happened at the Convention was the election of the Steering Committee. Prior to April 4th, the Steering Committee had operated as a "founder's Steering Committee", that is, the group of leaders who first came together to get the RIDVP up and running. But now with many more member organizations and lots of growth, we needed to make our organization more democratic through

electing the Steering Committee. There were ten available spots, and each member organization was eligible to cast one ballot.

Congratulations to our newly elected Steering Committee members, Stephanie Booth, Rory Carmody, Jeff Christie, Mark Fields, Rolf Gjertsen, Roger Harris, Joe Sabo, Mike Sicard, Amy Smith, and Robyn Wah! They will join Kate Bowden, Bob Cooper, and Linda Ward, who serve as the appointed Steering Committee members from the Disability Law Center, the Commission on Disabilities, and the Community Provider Network, respectively.

Steering Committee Member Wins Award

With these results, the Steering Committee says good-bye (just for the moment!) to Jon Dupré, who opted not to seek election this year because of a number of other commitments. Jon has been a terrific and highly motivational leader of the RIDVP. While serving on the Steering Committee from December of 2005, Jon contributed his time and talent as a Managing Director, member of the Freedom Committee, and member of the Convention Planning Committee.

For all of his advocacy work on behalf of people with disabilities, Jon won the 2007 Award for Excellence in Consumer and Family Leadership / Advocacy from the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare. He attended their 2007 annual conference in Las Vegas just before our convention! For more information on the National Council or the conference and the award, please visit www.nccbh.org.

Voice Your Support for H5969!

And speaking of advocacy, we need your help advocating for House bill 5969! This bill would require all candidates who receive public matching funds to make their television commercials accessible through using closed captioning. Right now, it is very difficult for members of our state's Deaf and Hard of Hearing community to follow what is going on during election season, since so much of the discussion takes place through TV ads. The RIDVP is therefore supporting bill H-5969 and we need your help!

On Wednesday, the House Committee on Health, Education and Welfare voted to recommend passage of this bill. The bill will go to the full Rhode Island House of Representatives as soon as the 24th of April! So, please contact your state representative and urge them to vote in favor of 5969 to make voting more accessible. (This bill would only apply to candidates who receive public matching funds – that is, it would not affect local races, state legislative races, or congressional races.)

Find out who your state representative is and how to contact them at the Secretary of State's Voter Information Center: www.sec.state.ri.us/vic. Please send them an email or call them, and let us know how it goes by emailing Jose, jlobaton@cox.net.

We will also be gathering signatures for a petition about this bill at the Warwick Mall, on Thursday April 19th, and Sunday April 27th. Please email James at ridvp@ridvp.org if you can help on the 19th, and Laurie Robertson at lauriemaymarti@cs.com if you can help on the 27th. We are hoping to collect over 1000 signatures by the end of April, and we're asking each member organization to circulate the attached petition among your staff, consumers, and family members. Please return them by 4/30/07!

We will keep you posted as the bill moves forward!

Upcoming Events:

OSCIL's 19th Annual Meeting, Wednesday, April 25, 2007 5- 7 p.m.
Warwick Public Library 600 Sandy Lane Warwick, RI 02886
Special Presentation: "Blind Sighted" by Dr. Raymond Mis
Please visit www.oscil.org for more information.

Also hosted by OSCIL: "A Spectrum of Alternatives to Help Improve Home Access"
A seminar hosted by the Ocean State Center for Independent Living (OSCIL) in celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the RI Governor's Commission on Disabilities.
Thursday, April 19, 2007 ~ 9 AM to 1 PM Warwick Public Library 600 Sandy Lane.

The Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities presents the 6th Partnerships to Employment Conference, April 24 and 25th, in Warwick RI: "Rekindle the Flame: Renewing Purpose and Passion in Work", presented by **Denise Bissonette**

This conference features 20 diverse breakout sessions and exhibit forum. Job seekers can take advantage of a resume critique service and work incentives screening available at the conference. For complete details visit the conference website – www.p2econference.com

The Campaign for Rhode Island's Priorities is organizing a series of community meetings where state legislators will be invited to come and hear from their constituents about how the budget proposals would affect our communities. "Come to a community meeting with your state legislators and tell them: Investing in the people of Rhode Island deserves long-term planning, not short-term fixes!" Fliers are attached for the Providence, West Bay, and Aquidneck meetings.

Thank you very much, take care!

PS – Reminder – North Providence special elections are this Tuesday! Please go out and vote if you live in North Providence!

Attachments: This newsletter
Strategic Planning Recommendations
Convention Evaluation
5969 Petition
OSCIL – GCD Spectrum Flier
Campaign for Rhode Island's Priorities fliers
Convention Photo

Fundraising

1. Walk & Roll-a-thon (when: pre-general election in October, where: Roger Williams Park, Goddard, Lincoln Woods, State House)
2. Make it an opportunity to reach out to consumers and their families, which will build membership
3. Use media-build awareness
4. Get corporate sponsorship

Recruitment

1. Research, identify, and target recruitment in state and local where we can have an impact, with no one-issue candidates, and ensuring candidates have the money necessary to run
2. Identify potential candidates within existing party structures
3. Identify potential candidates within disability rights community through activities such as coffee hours and surveys

Making voting easier for people

1. Automark: Use a) equipment must be working properly; tested at location; hotline for problems, b) users (promotion and availability to all voters), c) polling staff training (mandatory), d) backup plan in case of failure
2. Transportation: a) expand RIDE program with special shuttles; b) school buses as an option because schools are closed; c) increased availability and promotion of mail-in ballot; d) public transportation (waiving fares and special routes)
3. A uniformed standard of assistance at the polls, have a staff person that understands the disabled and can assist at every poll
4. Politician's awareness that people with disabilities are voters too (use closed-caption, commercials with pre-vote information, loops)

Election Year Activities

1. Focus on Presidential Primaries in early 2008: What are the candidate's positions on disability and disability-related issues; widely disseminate alternative format literature to Rhode Islanders with disabilities
2. GOTV mailings, PSA's, phone banking, transportation, registration drives, press conferences... partner with elderly community/other communities with similar interests
3. Personal contact with candidates: remind them of the size and power of our constituency (forums, transportation to campaign events)

Legislative priorities

1. Mandate closed-caption and sign-language interpreters for political ads
2. Develop relationships with legislators who sponsor voting rights bills- put a face on the constituency
3. One trained person with a disability at every polling place to help with automark

Outreach

1. Inform everyone about the issues & process of voting: print, video, radio, talk-radio, public access, friends/family, neighbors
2. Create an "advocacy school" for people with disabilities and those who work for them. Utilize universal formats, create "voter rights" sheets & posters for polling places
3. [For Legislative & Making Voting Easier groups: a) posters of disabled voter rights, b) educate poll workers on the rights of disabled voters, and c) monitor polling sites]