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Governor Signs Bill to Create Aphasia Task Force in New Jersey

New Jersey Speech-Language-Hearing Association – a Driver Behind the Law – Celebrates

TRENTON – May 3, 2017 – The New Jersey Speech-Language-Hearing Association (NJSHA) is celebrating a new law in New Jersey that establishes the 13-member “Mike Adler Aphasia Task Force” through the state Department of Health.

The bill (S.2286/A.3083), sponsored by Sen. Loretta Weinberg (D-Bergen) and Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttle (D-Bergen), will help ensure the needs of people with aphasia and their families will be assessed and that there will be enough support, resources and services available to meet those needs.

Gov. Chris Christie signed the legislation on May 1, after it received unanimous support in both houses of the state Legislature.

Aphasia is a disorder of the brain that affects a person’s ability to communicate, and which most commonly occurs after a stroke or traumatic brain injury. However, the condition does not affect a person's intellect.

It is estimated that one million people in the United States have aphasia, more than the number of people suffering from Parkinson's disease, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, or cerebral palsy. According to NJSHA, the type and severity of language dysfunction suffered by a person with aphasia depend on the precise location and extent of damaged brain tissue.

Generally, there are four types of aphasia: (1) expressive aphasia, which involves difficulty in conveying thoughts through speech or writing; (2) receptive aphasia, which involves difficulty in understanding spoken or written language; (3) anomia or amnesia aphasia, the least severe form of aphasia, which involves difficulty in using the correct names for particular objects, people, places, or events; and (4) global aphasia, the most severe form of aphasia, which involves the loss of almost all language function, both comprehension and expression.

“Speech-language pathologists have been advocating diligently for the passage of this bill through the Legislature, as there is a great need in the state to help people with aphasia,” said NJSHA President Dr. Gerard L. Caracciolo. “We appreciate the work of Senator Weinberg and Assemblywoman Vainieri Huttle, who have worked closely with us, immediately recognizing the importance of this legislation for so many families in New Jersey.”

New Jersey will now monitor for the prevalence of aphasia in New Jersey; assess the unmet needs of persons with aphasia and their families; identify and facilitate the establishment of aphasia support groups and other resources and services to help residents with aphasia and their families; and provide recommendations to state lawmakers.

“Unfortunately, some people with this disorder become withdrawn and isolated as a result of the challenges they face with communication,” Weinberg said. “Since we know speech therapy and other rehabilitative services lead to improvement, it's important that programs are available to our residents and that information on how to access them is publicized. The task force will undertake the work to do that.”

The legislation was named after Mike Adler, a businessman, philanthropist, and founder of the Adler Aphasia Center with campuses in Maywood and West Orange, who passed away in September 2015 at his home in Franklin Lakes.

Contact NJSBA for information on aphasia at info@njsha.org.

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