

**CITY OF PITTSBURGH/ALLEGHENY COUNTY
TASK FORCE ON DISABILITIES**

September 20, 2004

MINUTES

- Location:** First Floor Conference Room
Civic Building, 200 Ross Street
Pittsburgh, PA
- Members Present:** John Tague, Chairperson, Paul O’Hanlon, Co-chair, Jeff Parker,
Penny Perlman
- Members Absent:** Ruth Walter Brenyo, Aurelia Carter, Bill Chrisner, Al Condeluci,
Linda Dickerson, Liz Healey, Milton Henderson, Rich McGann ,
Katherine D. Seelman
- Others Present:** Laurie Anderson, Janine Brinkley, Holly Dick, Janet Evans, Pat
Fabiano, Adi Flesher, Shawn Fox, Erin Gray, Jerry Laychak,
Richard Meritzer, Lisa Moses, Shannon O’Malley, Evelyn Stypula,
Stan Swaintek

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Tague at 1:10 PM.

Approval of the Agenda:

Mr. Tague added Erin Gray of the Pennsylvania Health Law Project to talk about the Medicare Drug Plan.

Introductions:

All members and guests introduced themselves.

Approval of June 2004 Minutes:

Mr. Parker moved to APPROVE THE MARCH 2004 MINUTES AS PRESENTED. All members voted in favor of the motion.

Financial Report

Mr. Parker presented the Budget which was distributed to the members. In the 2004 – 2005 budget there was a one time \$1,000 allotment to be divided between the Task Force and Disability Connections.

Small Differences:

Mr. Tague requested that people who had not seen Small Differences have a copy. They identified themselves on the sign in sheet. The Task Force is producing a sequel following the youth through their transitions. Mr. O’Hanlon pointed out that local filmmaker Tony Buba won awards for Small Differences.

Mr. Parker said he met with Tony Buba in June and as soon as we get him the money he will start filming. We have been meeting with several funding sources. The next grant decision is in February for F. I. S. A. They are interested.

Nominating Process:

The Task Force has 13 members. Mr. Condeluci retired from the Task Force and Mr. Chrisner moved out of town. The process starts with soliciting nominations. The Nominating Committee will review resumes and biographies. They will then make recommendations to the Task Force who will then send the names of the nominees on the Mayor and the County Chief Executive.

Annual Meeting:

The meeting was well attended. Mr. Selders was the Keynote speaker.

Medicare Drug Program:

Erin Gray of the Pennsylvania Health Law Project spoke. This organization help people get into programs, represent consumers and provide advocacy. They are doing several things with regards to the Medicare Drug Program. First, they are providing training to people regarding the discount drug program. They are working with Radio Information as well as providing training on tape. Second, they are informing recipients of proposed changes to the regulation on their Type D coverage. People on Medicare will be losing this coverage under the proposal. Comments are due October 4th. The Pennsylvania Health Law Project web site is www.PHLP.org.

Mr. O'Hanlon pointed out people who switch from Medicaid to Medicare will be restricted on the drugs they can get and it will be harder for them to get equipment. Ms. Perlman asked about mental health medication. Ms. Gray responded that they are required to cover two drugs from every class and they tend to cover the older drugs. Evelyn Stypula asked if this includes current coverage. Ms. Gray said it starts as of January 2006. Jerry Laychak asked who proposed this change and Ms. Gray responded Congress proposed the change. She went on to say that everyone would be notified about the change. brought to the next meeting. Mr. Tague said that Representative Doyle had voted against this change but the American Association of Retires Persons (AARP) had supported it. He urged everyone to comment. He pointed out the Durable Medical Equipment is covered both by Part B and Part D.

Visitability:

Mr. O'Hanlon reported that City Council approved the Visitability Ordinance. But the State must enable the City to implement this Tax Credit. Council Member Sala Udin moved to hold implementation until the State gives the City approval. Mr. O'Hanlon will check with Council Member Udin on what he is doing to get approval.

Housing Discrimination:

Mr. O'Hanlon stated that the current concern is the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act requires that any recipient of federal funds not discriminate. The Housing Authority was required to make 5% of their housing stock accessible. In 1992 they asked for a waiver. In 1995 they entered into a voluntary compliance agreement. In 2002 they had only made 3% of the units accessible. The Housing Authority was sued. They won in both District Court and the 3rd Circuit Court. The 3rd Circuit Court said people with disabilities can not sue.

Mr. Tague asked if the Task Force should be doing something about this issue. Can other tactics be used? He suggested that we talk to members of the design committee. Mr. O'Hanlon suggested that it be made into a political issue. Ms. Evans asked if she could approach the Board of Directors. Mr. Tague said he would discuss this with Ruth Brenyo.

Inaccessible Polling Places:

Mr. O'Hanlon reported in March Mark Wolosik met with the Task Force to discuss inaccessible polling places. There are 258 inaccessible polling places in Allegheny County. This is 20 years after the law was passed that required accessible polling places. Mr. O'Hanlon suggested that we provide a finders' fee for anyone who can locate an accessible polling place to replace one that is inaccessible.

Mr. Tague informed the Task Force that he is trying to arraign a meeting with the County Chief Executive. He pointed out that a lot of these polling places are in the City. Mr. O'Hanlon responded that we do not have a list of the inaccessible polling places. Mr. Parker said he like that idea of a finders' fee. He said we should get the list. Ms. Pearlman suggested we do a follow – up report for the new media. Mr. O'Hanlon replied that the press is following up on this issue. We should make this issue work for us. There are a number of things we could do. But we need direction from the County Leadership.

Janet Evans reported that there is also a problem in accessible polling places that some people with disabilities can not reach the machines. She has someone go in with her when she votes. Mr. O'Hanlon responded that accessible voting machines are due in 2006.

Shawn Fox reported that the County Chief Executive was concern about this issue. The Task Force should talk directly with him. The question is who will pay the finders' fee. The timing is bad for any new expenditure. The floods have taken substantial resources from the County. Ms. Stypula asked if the League of Women's Voters could help. Mr. Fox thought that was a good suggestion. He also pointed out that if accessible polling places can't be located, people with disabilities can vote by absentee ballot.

Mr. O'Hanlon expressed his sympathy for the flood victims. But saying there are not enough resources does not help. We are being complicitous in depressing the disability vote. We should have emergency ballots at the polling places that are inaccessible. In the example used in the report, Carnegie, there are a number of alternate sites that could be used that are accessible, but there was a reason given not to use any of them. It would cost \$250 to make polling places accessible. If we offer a finders' fee of \$100 it would cost the County less money. The list of inaccessible polling places should be published in the newspaper. And we should determine how the alternative emergency ballots would work. If they need to file the forms at another location, that would make it impossible for people without available transportation.

Allegheny County Consolidated Plan:

Mr. O'Hanlon reported that the County is required to go through this planning process. They are taking input until November. The County web page has an online survey. Ms. Perlman asked if the Task Force should put together a position paper. Mr. O'Hanlon responded that we may convene something. At the last meeting of Let Voices Be Heard someone spoke from the County. The County will publish a preliminary plan and then hold a hearing. In the past it has been too late to change the plan at the hearing. The plan is due out by the second week in November.

Strategic Plan:

Janine Brinkley submitted a three page proposal from the Committee. The appendices are the issues and the disposition of those issues. The first page is where the data was gathered. During the process the Task Force redefined the scope and the mission of the Committee. The issues were divided in four categories: 1) those that can be easily accomplished; 2) issues that are the responsibility of an authority or other outside entity; 3) issues that need to be deferred but can not be addressed directly; and 4) major county issues. The main issues that came out of this process are employment and housing. In response to this report the Task Force would improve its advisory role with the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County. The committee is requesting approval of the report and that the Task Force set up committees including both Task Force members and other interested people. There were parallel issues from all three data sources. Ms. Perlman moved to APPROVE THE STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT AS PRESENTED. All members voted in favor of the motion.

Mr. O'Hanlon suggested that we could decide how to implement the plan at the October meeting of the Task Force. Mr. Parker asked that the Housing and Voting Accessibility Committees be put on the fast track. He also felt that Employment had to be a major focus. Holly Dick asked if we had access to the old mailing list. Richard Meritzer pointed out that we have a comprehensive Email contact list and he could send out a request to solicit volunteers. Ms. Brinkley suggested that the Task Force set up a time to discuss this.

Public Comment:

Ms. Stypula, Chairperson of the Coalition to Establish an Office for People with Disabilities, thanked the Task Force for their support. They had a Forum that morning. The legislation to establish the office is in the Senate State Government Committee now. The legislation must be approved by November 24, 2004. She said they need letters of support.

Mr. Laychak asked how far the Disability Connection Office has progressed. Mr. Tague responded that they are coordinating the National Disability Awareness Month and National Mentoring Day, which are next month. He suggested people ask her directly how it is progressing. The office has been funded for a year by a Foundation. Further funding may be an issue. Mr. Tague said he would ask her or her intern to come to the next meeting.

Laurie Anderson spoke on Radio Information Service. This is a private radio station. They read information over the airwaves. This is a service for anyone who can not read or hold reading material. They can be reached at www.readingservice.org. They are looking to the future and want to play a greater role in serving as a voice for the community. Mr. O'Hanlon asked about their activities in the approaching election and voting related issues. Ms. Anderson responded that they are planning to do programming on these issues. This is a subscription service which costs \$20 a year. Users need a special radio to get this service, but they can also use the web site and Radio Information Service has a phone-in service. Mr. O'Hanlon asked if Comcast could carry this service. Ms. Anderson said she would look into that.

Ms. Dick reported there is a crisis in transportation funding. Allegheny County Port Authority has a \$3 million deficit. Two bills have been under consideration in the State Legislature since June to provide more sales tax revenue to public transit and to remove the cap. They are Senate Bill #1162 and House Bill # 2697. She requested that anyone who knows residents in the center part of the state ask these residents to contact their state legislators. These bills include money for ride sharing programs. There are 70 transit companies in the state and every one of them will get something from this legislation.

Emerging New Issues:

Mr. Tague asked express concern regarding how people fared during the flood. Lisa Moses responded that she was going to a conference of the National Organization on Disabilities on emergency preparedness for people with disabilities.

Mr. O'Hanlon stated that Amtrak was eliminating half their service from Harrisburg to the western part of the state. The train being eliminated has luggage handling service. The remaining train does not. There is only one handicapped space per car. There are only four handicapped spaces today. He asked that the Task Force send a letter. Mr. Tague asked that Mr. O'Hanlon and Dr. Seelman draft the letter.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 3:15 PM.

THE NEXT TASK FORCE MEETING:	DATE:	October 18, 2004
	TIME:	1:00 P.M.
	LOCATION:	First Floor Conference Room Civic Building, 200 Ross Street Pittsburgh, PA 15219