

SOUTH CAROLINA PARTNERSHIP OF DISABILITY ORGANIZATIONS

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NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Disability Advocacy Day Brings Record Crowd to State House

record attendance of 543 South Carolinians with lifelong disabilities, their family members and service providers gathered at the State House for Disability Advocacy Day on March 7, 2007.

They came to Columbia from across the state to personally urge their legislators to support essential services for children and adults with autism, intellectual and developmental disabilities, brain injuries and spinal cord injuries.

A rally conducted by self advocates on the State House steps was part of Disability Advocacy Day. Eddie Hobson, president of IMPACT South Carolina, the statewide self advocacy organization, led the rally. "We want real jobs with real pay," said Mr. Hobson. Employment was one of the legislative priorities that advocates spoke about with their legislators during the day.

"Advocates asked legislators to act on their top three legislative priorities for citizens with disabilities and their families," said Mary Bennett, one of the coordinators of Disability Advocacy Day. "Funds are needed in the SC Department of Disabilities and Special Needs (DDSN) budget to meet the needs stated in our priorities."

The three priorities are:

- People need services now, but waiting lists for essential services continue to grow. A total of 4,351 individuals are on waiting lists for residential, day and employment support services, as of 6/30/06, compared to 3,893 last year, according to the SC Department of Disabilities and Special Needs. At least 689 of these individuals

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currently live with parents who are age 72 and older. Their greatest concern is: "What will happen when I die or no longer am able to provide the care that is needed."

- Self advocates want real jobs with real pay. This is the highest priority expressed by people with disabilities. They want to work and be taxpayers. They want to earn money to lead normal
- lives in the community. The large majority of people with severe lifelong disabilities are able to work, but their employment rate is extremely low compared to the general population.
- Family support funds are good for the family and good for the economy. Families need help to care at home for their loved one with a disability. Support services allow family members to work to earn money, lead normal lives and prevent the costly consequences for the state of not having essential support.

Examples of support services include early intervention for children, day and employment services, in-home assistance, respite care, personal care attendants, crisis intervention, specialized medical and behavioral services, assistive technology, home modifications, education and training.

"The quality of life for citizens with disabilities depends on the support of the Governor and members of the General Assembly in addressing urgent needs," stated Ms. Bennett.

Co-sponsors of Disability Advocacy Day are The Arc of SC-Advocates for Special Needs, SC Autism Society, Brain Injury Alliance of SC, SC Spinal Cord Injury Association, SC Partnership of Disability Organizations, SC Human Services Providers Association, The Disability Action Center, Inc., SC Respite Coalition, Family Connection of SC, Epilepsy Foundation of SC, SC Chapter of American Association Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD), Babcock Center, Inc. and People On the Go-Self Advocacy.