

## Governor Spitzer signs "Person First" Legislation (September 2007)

On Wednesday, August 1st, Governor Spitzer signed the "Person First" bill requiring the use of "person first" language when describing individuals with disabilities in legal documents, publications, and state and local legislation.

The text of the bill reads:

"On or after the effective date of this section (immediately), all new and revised statutes, local laws, ordinances, charters or regulations promulgated or any publication published by the state or any political subdivision that refer to persons with disabilities shall seek to:

1. avoid language that
  - o implies that a person as a whole is disabled (e.g., the mentally ill or the learning disabled),
  - o equates persons with their condition (e.g., epileptics, autistics or quadriplegics),
  - o has negative overtones (e.g., afflicted with cerebral palsy, suffering from multiple sclerosis, confined to a wheelchair or wheel-chair bound) or
  - o is regarded as derogatory or demeaning (e.g., handicapped or mentally deficient); and
2. replace non-respectful language by referring to persons with disabilities as persons first (e.g., individuals with disabilities, individuals with developmental disabilities, individuals with mental illness, individuals with autism or individuals with mental retardation)."

Assemblyman Harvey Weisenberg (D-Long Beach) re-introduced the bill in February. It had previously been approved by the New York State Assembly and Senate, but was vetoed by former Governor Pataki.

### When Referring to a Person's Disability Use Person First Language!

PEOPLE FIRST LANGUAGE	LABELS NOT TO USE
People with disabilities	The handicapped or disabled
People with mental retardation He has a cognitive impairment	The mentally retarded He's retarded
My son has autism	My son is autistic
She has Down Syndrome	She's a Downs kid, a mongoloid
He has a learning disability	He's learning disabled
I have paraplegia	I'm a paraplegic
She has a physical disability She has a mobility impairment	She's crippled
He's of short stature	He's a dwarf (or midget)
She has an emotional disability	She's emotionally disturbed
He uses a wheelchair	He's wheelchair bound or confined to a wheelchair
A typical person or a person without a disability	Normal and/or healthy person
He receives special education services	He's in special education
Congenital disability	Birth defect
Accessible parking, bathrooms, etc.	Handicapped parking, bathrooms, etc.
She has a need for. . .	She has a problem with. . .

- Do not refer to a person's disability unless it is relevant... REMEMBER, people are **PEOPLE FIRST, DISABILITY SECOND!**
- Use **disability** rather than "handicap" to refer to a person's disability.
- Avoid negative or sensational descriptions of a person's disability.
- Don't use "normal" to describe people without disabilities; instead say **people without disabilities** or **typical**, if comparisons are necessary.
- Never assume that a person with a communication disorder also has a cognitive disability such as mental retardation.
- Don't portray people with disabilities as overly courageous, brave, special, or super human.