

# Mom describes fight for Medicaid

## Now receives it for disabled daughter

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A trail-blazer who obtained Medicaid coverage for her mentally and physically disabled child was the keynote speaker at a legislative luncheon yesterday in the Columbian Lyceum, West Brighton.

Hosted by the Staten Island Retardation and Disabilities Council (SIRDC), the 12th annual gathering was attended by three of Staten Island's lawmakers, professionals who work with disabled people, disabled people and the parents of disabled children.

One objective of the luncheon was to educate state lawmakers about the needs of Staten Island's disabled population before Albany's budget adoption process begins in the spring, according to SIRDC Chairwoman Linda Coull.

The impact session would

have on disabled Staten Islanders was also addressed at the luncheon during a question-and-answer period.

With help from the SIRDC and government agencies on both state and city levels, Marie Goepel and her husband obtained Medicaid coverage for their mentally and physically disabled 9-year-old daughter, who can't walk, talk or feed herself.

Only in the past 18 months has Medicaid become available to some middle class families who can prove the expenses associated with their handicapped children make them eligible for assistance.

The application process for Medicaid was lengthy and, because of the new eligibility guidelines, difficult to navigate, according to SIRDC member Diane Buglioli. She described Mrs. Goepel as a local trail-blazer who worked for nine months to get through the process.

Giving an example of the costs related to her daughter's disabilities, Mrs. Goepel said a wheel-

chair, which she will outgrow in a few years, cost the family \$4,000. Between the Goepels' insurance policies, they would have received only a \$75 reimbursement for the purchase of the chair. With Medicaid, the entire cost was covered.

Mrs. Buglioli said diapers were a \$200 a month out-of-pocket cost for the Goepels that are now covered under Medicaid.

There were also questions about secession yesterday. Many people asked what impact it would have on disabled Staten Islanders if the borough split from New York City. The parent of a disabled child who now is bused to another borough for her special education asked, "how will my child be taken care of?"

Assemblyman Eric Vitaliano told the woman in a separate city of Staten Island, there would be only one school district that would provide all of the public school educational programs. Vitaliano told the woman he thought her child would be better off in a "home-grown" program developed by "the parents and teachers right here."

Asked for an opinion on the impact secession would have on programs for the disabled, Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly and Assemblyman Robert

Straniere both said they would be able to draw in more money. "I feel very comfortable that we can do better as the third-largest city of the state ... rather than 5 percent of New York City," Mrs. Connelly said.

"As the 35th largest city in the nation, we will also be able to make our case in Washington," Straniere said.

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Randy Bolton of the Staten Island Advocacy Committee, left, Bob Witkowsky, director of Staten Island Developmental Disabilities Services Offices, Linda Coull, chairwoman of Staten Island Retardation and Disabilities Council, and Donna Long of the Staten Island Advocacy Committee gather at the council's luncheon in the Columbian Lyceum, West Brighton.

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