



Contact: Michelle West
(719) 471-8181 ext. 143

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FIRST ANNUAL BRIEFING FOR STATE LEGISLATORS HELD AT THE INDEPENDENCE CENTER

COLORADO SPRINGS, CO, September 29, 2015 – The first annual Legislative Breakfast occurred at The Independence Center (The IC) September 28, 2015. Six state legislators attended the briefing where eight specific issues faced by people with disabilities were presented and discussed. Presentations on each issue were given by staff members of The Independence Center. Discussions included input from staff, legislators and The IC board members. The briefing was moderated by Patricia Yeager, CEO of The IC.

Issues on the table were housing, transit, employment, community transitions (referring to transition out of nursing homes into independent living), home modifications/ assistive technology, emergency preparedness, rural issues and home health. Each issue was framed as an opportunity for the legislators to observe that cost savings to the state and independent living for those with disabilities are not mutually exclusive.

“If we can get in the door, if we can get on the bus, if employers will hire us, we will be taxpayers,” Patricia Yeager, CEO stated regarding the need for accessibility in buildings, transportation, and the private employment sector.

The briefing took on a notable tone of dialogue, with legislators often providing comments, asking questions, and providing status updates regarding certain issues. Current issues were raised in this manner such as the status of CDOT Bustang collaboration with El Paso County and the impending merger of the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment.

What became apparent during the briefing was the significant interrelationship between the issues, and that solutions to one issue may very well serve as solutions to other issues accordingly.

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For example, housing is interrelated with community transitions. Because the Pikes Peak region lacks affordable, accessible housing, oftentimes people with disabilities reside unnecessarily in nursing homes, costing the state thousands of dollars each month in Medicaid costs. Working to solve the problem of lack of affordable housing inventory will also help save money in Medicaid dollars to nursing homes.

The breakfast discussion remained largely non-political and incorporated facts as well as anecdotal stories. For instance, Rep. Terri Carver spoke of experience from her early work as a 19-year-old in home health care and Rep. Janak Joshi spoke of his experience as a physician treating patients with transportation needs in rural areas. The officials were clearly engaged, concerned, and expressed gratitude to The IC with an ovation at the conclusion.

State legislature attendees were Sen. Kent Lambert (R), Rep. Terri Carver (R), Rep. Janak Joshi (R), Rep. Pete Lee (D), Rep. Paul Lundeen (R) and Rep. Gordon Klingensmith (R).

About The Independence Center

The Independence Center is a local nonprofit organization that provides traditional and self-directed home health care, independent living, and advocacy services for people with disabilities. These services range from providing peer support, skills classes, and employment assistance to individual and systems advocacy. The IC's mission is to work with people with disabilities, their families, and the community to create independence so all may thrive.

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