

STAVROS NEWS

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A Message from the Director about Question 1 and People with Disabilities

Dear Friends,

This year's Presidential election is the most exciting one in a long time! But you will have many other choices to make for Massachusetts on November 4, including several "ballot questions." One of them – "Question 1" – could have a big impact on people with disabilities. Here are some things to keep in mind about Question 1.

What is Question 1?

A YES vote on Question 1 would mean the state's personal income tax rate would drop to 2.65% for the tax year beginning January 1, 2009 (the rate is currently over 5%); the income tax would then disappear completely as of January 1, 2010.

What would no income tax mean for Massachusetts?

The income tax currently brings in \$12 to \$13 *billion* dollars each year for state programs. Our governor and legislators would need to cut the annual state budget by about 45% - that's almost half. Or they would need to find ways to replace that money.

Okay, that's a lot of money. But what would it mean for people with disabilities?

Nobody can be sure. But it's important to remember that the Personal Care Attendant (PCA) program gets half its' funding from Massachusetts and half from the federal government. If the state budget shrinks by almost 50%, there may be deep cuts to the PCA program. What else could happen? State housing voucher programs could shrink or disappear, making it even harder to find affordable, accessible housing. Local school districts could lose state support for special education programs, putting kids with disabilities further behind. Elders with disabilities could lose home care services, meals on wheels, and state-supported prescription drug benefits. And there are many other programs and supports that could be cut or eliminated.

Couldn't the state or my local community replace the money with other taxes?

Maybe, but that might not work out well. The state could increase and expand the sales tax, for example. But that could mean a tax on food and clothing, and that could really hurt people on limited incomes. Your city or town could try to make up the loss of state support by increasing property taxes. This could be devastating for property owners on fixed incomes, and people who rent would see their monthly rents go way up.

What about the other side of the coin? What about arguments in favor of Question 1?

Supporters of Question 1 argue that there is a lot of waste in state government – so much that the revenues lost from the income tax wouldn't be missed. From what I've read, if you eliminated every state job – that includes state troopers and people who keep our state parks clean, as well as bureaucrats in Boston – you'd save four to five billion dollars. That means we'd lose some important services and still have to cut billions of dollars from the state budget. Supporters also argue that with no income tax Massachusetts would add hundreds of thousands of jobs, and cities and towns would be able to replace the money lost from state aid. This might happen, but it would take a lot of time, and we'd be losing a lot of money for services in 2010. It's also very likely that some parts of the state would see lots of job creation while others would see none, and that every few years we'd see the number of jobs fall as the economy goes through a boom and bust cycle.

There are lots of things to think about as you make your decision about Question 1. I hope this information about the possible impact on persons with disabilities is helpful to you.

Jim Kruidenier
Executive Director

Stavros now has S.H.I.N.E. representative in Amherst

The Western Regional SHINE (Serving Health Information Needs of Elders) program, will now have a counselor available at Stavros! Linda Mason of South Hadley--a recently retired Stavros employee--is now available to counsel Medicare Beneficiaries at the Amherst Stavros office located at 210 Old Farm Rd. Linda will be available on a regular basis by appointment on Monday and Wednesday mornings. To schedule an appointment you can contact Stavros by calling 413-256-0473. Counselors are trained in a wide variety of areas including Medicare, supplementing Medicare with a Medi-gap policy or Medicare Advantage Plans, Public Benefits Programs, Prescription Advantage, and more.

SHINE, Serving Health Information Needs of Elders Program, provides free, confidential and unbiased health insurance counseling for Medicare beneficiaries. To reach a trained and certified counselor in your area, contact the Regional Office at 1-800-498-4232 or 413-773-5555 or contact your local Council on Aging.

COMING SOON!

Stavros is looking for better ways to communicate with you about issues of importance to the disability community. We know how important your voice is and that your concerns about certain issues need to be addressed by contacting policy makers in your area. Starting January 2009, when you call our 800 number you can select menu option **number 5** and receive information on issues that need your advocacy and the steps you can take to do something about them.

New MassHealth Cards

All people receiving MassHealth benefits will be receiving new *member identification (also known as ID) cards* between now and the end of January. The new card will display the member's name and a new 12-digit ID number.

MassHealth is making every effort to mail all cards associated with a household at the same time. With so many cards going in the mail at once, though, it's possible that members of the same family will receive their cards at different times.

In case a card is returned to MassHealth as undeliverable, MassHealth will ***not*** take action to end the member's benefits. Instead, the card will be sent to a special project at MassHealth that is working to make sure that everybody gets their cards. If you need to report a change of address or if you have questions regarding your MassHealth card please contact 1.800.841.2900 (TTY: 1.800.497.4648).

A New Life for the Americans with Disabilities Act

When the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became law in 1990, people with disabilities finally had a civil rights act that provided them with fundamental rights of access and employment.

Over the years, however, the United States Supreme Court has made our Act smaller and smaller in the area of job protections, making it harder for disabled individuals to prove discrimination on the job.

For the last two years, disability rights advocates and business groups have worked together – yes, together – to take our Act back from the Supreme Court. Now we have the ADA Improvements Act of 2008, and finally working Americans with disabilities have their protections back.

Under the new law, people with epilepsy, diabetes, cancer, multiple sclerosis and other disabling conditions that can be partially controlled by medications or assistive devices will now get their day in court. And many others won't have to go to court at all, as more employers will start offering accommodations and fair treatment.

The Act had nearly unanimous support from Republicans and Democrats alike. As Orrin Hatch, the Republican senator from Utah said, the new law “will make a real difference in the lives of real people.” Hurray for the ADA!

GETTING THROUGH A COLD WINTER

Winter in New England is never easy, and this year the cost of heating your home or apartment will probably be more costly than ever. If you pay for your own heat – oil, electric, or gas – and you think you’re going to run out of money before spring comes, there are a couple of things you can do.

If you live in Hampden County, call the Valley Opportunity Council at 552.1554; if you live in Franklin or Hampshire Counties call Community Action at 774.2318 –and ask about their home heating subsidies.

And don’t forget about your electric or gas company. They may be able to offer help as well. But all these programs are first-come, first-serve, so if you see trouble ahead, make your calls now.

STAVROS WILL CELEBRATE 35!

Yes it has been that long! Stavros first started providing services in Hampshire County in 1974. Since then, we have helped thousands of people to live independently in the Pioneer Valley and have worked diligently to make our communities accessible to all. Coming Soon Stavros will be offering a calendar that describes our services and celebrates our success for a donation of \$35 or more. If you are interested in a copy of this calendar please send your donations to *Stavros CIL 210 Old Farm Road, Amherst, MA 01002 attention: Calendar.*



www.stavros.org

