

JPAC *for OLDER ADULTS*

Joint Public Affairs Committee / 132 West 31st Street – 10th Floor / NY, NY 10001 / 212-273-5262
Sponsored by Jewish Association for Services for the Aged (JASA)

**Governor Spitzer's "Partnership for Coverage" task force
New York State Department of Health (DOH) and Insurance (DOI) Public Hearing
November 2, 2007**

Remarks by Cameron Gelisse
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Joint Public Affairs Committee for Older Adults (JPAC)

Members of the committee thank you for inviting me to speak today and for conducting this important hearing. I would also like to applaud Governor Spitzer for creating this task force.

My name is Cameron Gelisse and I am the Brooklyn Borough Coordinator for the Joint Public Affairs Committee for Older Adults (JPAC). JPAC is a non-partisan interdenominational, multicultural social action coalition of older adult representatives from senior centers, community groups, agencies and independent individuals from throughout Metropolitan New York. For 30 years JPAC and its members have been fighting for programs and protections that benefit the lives of older adults in the New York City area. JPAC certainly supports the development of universal health coverage, and will gladly work with you to continue this effort. We do understand that this is not an easy undertaking and it may take many years before we see this come to fruition. That said I would like to speak with you briefly today in regard to an issue that can be addressed immediately to help make insurance affordable to a large group of New Yorkers.

Legislation is currently in Albany that would make the EPIC program available to low and moderate income individuals living with disabilities. Among our victories is the passage of the legislation that brought about the EPIC program. In fact, this bill was signed by the Governor at JPAC's office in recognition of our role. Since then, we have been advocating for many expansions to the program, one of them being the issue I bring your attention to today; state legislation which would make certain persons who are eligible for SSDI benefits eligible for the EPIC Program. JPAC strongly supports this legislation, and calls upon your help getting New York State Legislature to adopt this legislation, as specified in the New York State Senate, S. 2644 and New York State Assembly, A. 5178.

EPIC has been a lifeline for older adults of low and moderate incomes for years and continues to provide incredible prescription drug coverage to eligible seniors. Unfortunately people with disabilities are not given the same privileges and assurances granted to seniors enrolled in the program even though they face many of the same barriers to obtaining medically necessary prescription drug coverage. Their limited income, inability to work, lack

of employer paid health insurance and prescription coverage caps by health insurers make life extremely difficult. Seriously compromising their health and well being, many individuals with disabilities are deterred from taking their doctor prescribed medications due to their inability to afford pharmaceuticals that are not only essential to their health, but also enhance quality of life by keeping them able to live with dignity and autonomy as active members of their community.

Representing JPAC here today, I strongly urge that you to call upon NYS Legislature to make the EPIC program available to low and moderate income New Yorkers under the age of 65, with disabilities who are either in Medicare's two-year waiting period before they are eligible for Medicare Part D, or who are receiving Part D benefits, but are unable to afford the expensive premium, deductible, co-pays and "donut hole" costs which are required if their income is above the 150% of the Federal Poverty Level (e.g. am mere \$24,900 a year for a family of 3). Not only will the passage of S. 2644 and A. 5178 improve the health and peace of mind of people living with disabilities, but their inclusion will reduce emergency room usage, hospitalizations and institutionalizations, thereby saving health care dollars for the State government.

Thank you.