



COUNTY OF DELAWARE
GOVERNMENT CENTER BUILDING
201 W. FRONT STREET
MEDIA, PENNSYLVANIA

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Andy Lewis
Mario J. Civera, Jr.

610-891-4931
FAX NUMBER 610-891-8055
E-MAIL: delcopr@co.delaware.pa.us

Department of Public Relations
William A. Lovejoy, Jr.
Director

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Contact: Trish Coffell
Communications Officer
610-891-4943



County Council announces disability name change
Mental retardation is replaced with Office of Intellectual Disabilities

Delaware County Council and the Department of Human Services announced a significant name change Tuesday, going from the Office of Mental Retardation to the Office of Intellectual Disabilities, effective immediately.

The name change reflects the preference of advocates, consumers in the community and the staff of the office that serves people with intellectual disabilities. The name change corresponds with the office's goal of optimal independence, inclusion and quality of life for individuals and their families.

County Councilman Tom McGarrigle was joined by Human Services Director Dorothy Klein and Kathy Moffa, deputy administrator for the Office of Intellectual Disabilities (OID), in making the announcement at the Tuesday, Dec. 21, County Council meeting.

Also present were members of the Everyday Lives Committee, which is composed of stakeholders, self-advocates in the community and family members who work to ensure that individuals with intellectual disabilities have self-determined lives.

“What has been known as the County Office of Mental Retardation is now going to be called the Office of Intellectual Disabilities,” said Councilman McGarrigle. “At face value, this is simply a change in name, a change in words. But the important thing is, the change in name represents a change in attitude. Changing the name of this office is a milestone in the ongoing battle for dignity, inclusion and respect for all people with intellectual disabilities.”

McGarrigle said that the term “mental retardation” was originally a clinical term used with good intentions, but the term ended up being widely used to denigrate and insult people with intellectual disabilities.

“By changing the name of our County office, County Council and the Department of Human Services is sending a strong message that language is important and that words can hurt people and perpetuate stereotypes,” McGarrigle said. “So I am happy to be able to announce this name change as part of overall efforts for inclusion and acceptance.”

The County name change comes at the same time as the federal government enacts Rosa’s Law, which eliminates the term “mental retardation” from all federal law and replaces it with “intellectual disabilities.”

Rosa’s Law was named after a young girl from Maryland who has Down syndrome. Her family, including her brothers, successfully worked for the change at the highest level of government.

Mrs. Moffa said the County name change is effective now and will be reflected over the next few weeks as the office’s Web site, brochures, publications and other materials are updated.