



# Empire Justice Center

Telesca Center for Justice

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September 13, 2011

The Honorable Andrew Cuomo  
New York State Capitol  
Albany, NY 12224

**RE: A.3304-a/S.5556 – Health-Related Legal Services Programs**

Dear Governor Cuomo,

I am writing to urge you to sign A.3304-a/S.5556, the bill creating Health-Related Legal Services Programs, which has been sent to you for your approval. Health-Related Legal Services Programs promote collaboration between healthcare professionals and lawyers at healthcare settings for the purpose of identifying and resolving legal issues affecting patients' health and well-being.

The Health Related Legal Services Program model already operates in limited locations in New York (known as Medical-Legal Partnerships). This bill would provide state recognition of the model and thus pave the way for stabilization and expansion of these essential services throughout New York.

Typically, a patient who is referred by a health care provider to a lawyer under this program has multiple unmet legal needs that include socio-economic problems that legal assistance can help to resolve. When these and other legal issues arise during an illness, they can compound the difficulty of resolving patients' medical problems. The Health-Related Legal Services Program combines traditional legal representation for low-income and vulnerable individuals with collaboration with healthcare professionals, resulting in a comprehensive approach to the individual's healthcare needs.

Upon referral by the health care provider, lawyers work to remove the barriers that may cause detriment to the patient's health, helping to meet basic needs including housing (resolving substandard housing conditions, lead paint hazards, for example), eligibility for health insurance coverage, eligibility for employment benefits (for example Family and Medical Leave Act, to allow a family member to care for sick loved one), eligibility for income supports (such as TANF, SSI benefits, or food stamps), domestic violence protection, family law (to arrange for


guardianships, custody, and child support to stabilize a patient's living situation) and advance planning and special education (to secure appropriate education for chronically sick or disabled children).

In light of federal health care reform implementation, as well as New York's own Medicaid redesign efforts, Health-Related Legal Services Programs will play a crucial role, providing assistance to patients and the medical community to prevent unnecessary hospital readmissions, stabilize patients in the community, assist in safe and appropriate discharge planning and to help physicians and patients navigate the new requirements of the re-designed health care system in order to obtain coverage.

Empire Justice coordinated a program in 2008 that assisted patients at a federally qualified health center with obtaining and retaining Medicaid coverage. Our experience with that program demonstrated that increasing access to coverage on site at a community clinic can both increase provider revenue and improve patient outcomes by increasing access to preventive care. Similar models could be integrated into the consumer assistance programs and Navigator services created under federal health care reform.

Empire Justice urges the adoption of this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Trilby de Jung", is displayed on a light gray rectangular background.

Trilby de Jung  
Senior Health Law Attorney  
Empire Justice Center  
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