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## Maywood center applauds advance of bill to aid stroke victims

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THE RECORD

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**MAYWOOD** — Supporters of a bill that would help stroke victims learn to communicate and cope with a disorder called aphasia say they are one step closer to bringing awareness to the condition.

The Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee of the state legislature unanimously approved a bill Monday that would establish the New Jersey Aphasia Study Commission — paving the way for the legislature to vote on the bill in September.

Aphasia is a language disorder that limits a person's reading, writing and speaking abilities. People maintain their intellect, but struggle to communicate. The most common causes are a stroke or a traumatic brain injury.

"We have trouble getting aphasia known to the general public," said Elaine Adler who co-founded the Adler Aphasia Center in Maywood with her husband Mike, who suffers from the disorder. "Over a million people in the United States have aphasia and yet it's not tip-of-the-tongue information."

Mike Adler was told he would never speak again after his stroke. He proved the doctors wrong, and wanted to help others afflicted with the condition.

The Adlers hope the commission will bring much-needed awareness and more funding for programs like theirs.

The commission would research the prevalence of aphasia in the state and decide what resources patients need, said committee chair and Sen. Loretta Weinberg, D-Teaneck, adding that this is the first state bill of its type, she said.

The Maywood center's staff and members worked to support the bill. Executive Director Karen Tucker testified in front of two state committees about aphasia awareness.

"From the beginning we've been in touch with our representative assemblywoman and Senator Weinberg," Tucker said. "Our members have always written letters to their representatives to let them know what aphasia is and why they should support it."

Weinberg is all too familiar with the struggles of aphasia. Her mother and sister suffer from the condition, she said.

"With the budget constraints, there's less support and less help out there," Weinberg said, explaining that this year's state budget does not include money for patients who suffered from strokes. "We need to see that the state of New Jersey can aid people with this disability."

Weinberg praised the center as being a strong advocate for aphasia awareness. In 2003, it became the second facility in the country and is now a leader among 36 such places, she said.

"They've done remarkable support work for people who have the disability," Weinberg said.

Bill Grundy, 52, is a member of the center who has trouble speaking, occasionally relying on writing in the



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The Adler Aphasia Center in Maywood has been advocating for a bill in the state legislature to study aphasia.

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air to get his points across. When asked how he felt about cuts to state funding for stroke victims, his smile faded.

“No,” the [Ridgewood](#) resident said, rapidly waving his index finger. “It made me mad.”

Vernon Wilson, 51, of [Paterson](#), said he feels strongly about supporting the bill.

“We need money,” he said. “It’ll be good help for our families and caregivers.”

Wilson said he hopes passage of the legislation will bring more awareness to people with aphasia and their capabilities.

“I don’t like to be talked to in the third person,” he said. “I’m here, too. I love to talk because I couldn’t before.”

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