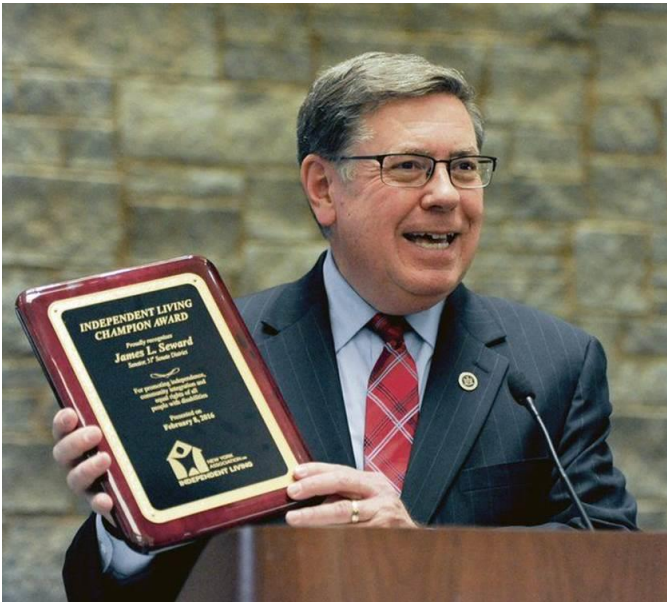


# Senator Honored For Promoting Independent Living

• By Jessica Reynolds Staff Writer (Printed in its entirety from the Oneonta Daily Star.)



Contributed State Sen. James Seward, R-Milford, accepts his Independent Living Champion award Monday at the annual New York Association for Independent Living Legislative Day event in Albany.

State Sen. James Seward, R-Milford, was honored by a state agency Monday for being “an Independent Living Champion,” according to officials.

Disability advocates from across the state gathered at the annual New York Association for Independent Living Legislative Day event in Albany, where Seward was given the Independent Living Champion award, according to a recent media release. The award recognizes efforts to promote independence, community integration and equal rights of all people with disabilities.

“I was very honored to receive the award,” Seward said Tuesday. “The way I see it, it just makes perfect sense to assist disabled people in being able to live independently in the community. It’s better for the individual and certainly better for the communities and our economy because these centers help people to be out in the workforce performing.”

Seward has been a “steadfast supporter” of local independent living centers, including those in Oneonta, Herkimer and Cortland, according to Chris Zachmeyer, executive director of the Catskill Center for Independence in Oneonta.

“Senator Seward’s constituents are a top priority,” Zachmeyer said. “He is genuinely and routinely responsive to his constituents’ needs both in his district offices and at his Albany office. He never wavers in hearing them and representing their views in the work he does every day.”

The New York Association for Independent Living is a membership organization composed of and created by independent living centers across New York, according to the release. Independent living centers are unique disability-led advocacy and service organizations that assist people with disabilities, regardless of age or diagnosis, to live independent, fully integrated lives in their communities.

The agency also advocates to improve the quality of life and safeguard the civil rights of people with disabilities, including access to long-term services and supports, physical access to public spaces, equal opportunity in employment and education, affordable and accessible housing, and adequate, accessible transportation services, the release said.

Last year, Seward was able to help secure funding for independent living centers across the state, he said. This was the first in more than a decade that the centers had received money, he added.

Seward said he appreciated the Monday recognition but could not take all the credit.

“It really should go to those folks who work in the various independence living centers,” Seward said. “I’ve observed over the years some of the important work that they do in terms of assisting disabled individuals to be able to live independently in the community, and that’s very important work.”

The Catskill Center for Independence is a nonprofit center for independent living located on state Highway 23 in Oneonta. It provides services to individuals with disabilities in an effort to increase integration within their community in all aspects of their life, according to the organization’s website.

“They are great advocates,” Seward said. “They also are passionate about making conditions in our community user-friendly for disabled people. They really help them to be able to be full members of our community. In many cases, it could not happen without them.”