Obama Administration Reaches out to Disability Community

Michael Morris, chief executive officer of The Burton Blatt Institute: Centers of Innovation on Disability and Eve Hill, senior vice president of the Burton Blatt Institute, represented BBI at a meeting with Kareem Dale and other transition staff leaders for President-Elect Barak Obama on Tuesday, January 13. BBI was one of several disability advocacy organizations invited to meet with the Obama Transition Team. The meeting provided the opportunity for BBI to offer policy recommendations to the incoming administration on economic empowerment and accessible affordable housing. The BBI policy team recommended eight critical actions the President and federal agencies could take in the first 100 days.

The recommendations highlighted the challenges, opportunities for change, and recommendations on economic empowerment for adults with disabilities and independent community living for adults with disabilities:

- Target IRS community partnership development and volunteer tax preparation assistance (VITA) to reach low income tax payers with disabilities and enhance their access and use of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), financial education, low-cost affordable financial services and products, and savings and asset building strategies.

- Establish an Interagency Federal Task Force on Economic Empowerment for working age adults with disabilities to identify barriers and propose solutions to federal policies that create disincentive to work, savings and asset building.

- Enact a tax advantaged family savings program to encourage families with children with disabilities to set aside funds for future asset goals.

- Require all economic stimulus funded development infrastructure projects to adopt universal design standards and affirmatively support employment of persons with disabilities.
• Increase DOJ (Department of Justice) and HUD (Housing & Urban Development) monitoring and enforcement of FHAA (Fair Housing Amendments Act) and UFAS (Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards) accessibility requirements.

• Expand the FHAA to require accessibility elements in alterations.

• Adopt visitability standards for all HUD and Fannie Mae financed or subsidized single or multifamily housing to expand accessible housing design, development and maintenance.

• Centralize and expand funding, loan programs, and tax credits for homeowner, renter, and landlord expenditures to increase accessibility.

Eve Hill noted, “With the current spotlight on economic conditions and the housing market in the United States, there is no better time for targeted government action that leaves no working age adult with disabilities behind and focuses on a pathway out of poverty and full community integration in affordable and accessible single and multifamily housing. We are heartened by the new administration’s demonstration of its willingness to work with the disability community and we at BBI look forward to helping inform the administration’s policymaking efforts.”

Although BBI was established only three years ago as a multidisciplinary research and training center, its influence on the business community and government and nongovernmental organizations worldwide is helping transform civil society. BBI is dedicated to advancing the civic, economic and social participation of persons with disabilities in the United States and in developing countries around the world.

The institute is based at SU and has offices in the District of Columbia, New York City, Atlanta and Tel Aviv. The institute focuses on research, education, training, policy development, technical assistance and outreach regarding disability issues. BBI takes its name from Burton Blatt (1927–85), a pioneer in humanizing services for people with disabilities.

For further information about the meeting, contact Michael Morris at mmorris@ndi-inc.org or 202-296-2046, or Eve Hill at ehill@law.syr.edu or 202-296-2044. For more information on BBI, visit http://bbi.syr.edu or contact Me’Shae Rolling, director of special events and public relations, at (315) 443-8455 or mrolling@law.syr.edu.

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