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## **TEN YEARS AFTER “BILLY’S LAW”, ALBANESE LIVING EMPOWERED LIFE**

PRINCETON, NJ - (July 07, 2014) Nearly ten years after Billy’s Law was signed into effect in the state of New York, Billy Albanese has been fulfilling his hope of living an independent life, after facing many extreme cases of abuse as a person with a disability.

In 1984, Billy, a native New Yorker, suffered a traumatic brain injury. In 1990, he was sent to Crotched Mountain Rehabilitation Center in New Hampshire for special education and job training. However; he never received the training and education as promised. Instead, he suffered from bullying from both staff and co-workers in an unsafe environment. On multiple occasions, he was knocked out of his wheelchair.

Shortly thereafter, his father, Vito, moved him to Bancroft Neurohealth, a facility in Haddonfield, NJ. The vice president of Bancroft promised Vito that there would be no physical discipline or restraining. However, more physical abuse and neglect followed, as well as further threats by the staff if Billy mentioned such incidents to outsiders. Billy was reportedly left unsupervised in his wheelchair on numerous occasions, resulting in three falls, which required a total of 40 stitches to his face and head. After Vito took Billy out of Bancroft, he found out that Bancroft had lost their license during Billy’s time there.

Vito brought his son back to their Bay Ridge home in 2000. Vito lobbied local assemblywoman, Joan L. Millan (D-Brooklyn) and state senator Vincent Gentile (D-Brooklyn) to prevent out-of-state facilities serving New Yorkers to operate under looser standards than in-state centers.

The two legislators created “Billy’s Law”, which increased inspections of out-of-state centers, mandated that centers must face inspection before being deemed eligible and created more facilities in New York to prevent more people being sent out-of-state. It was finally signed into law on August 4, 2005 (and again in New York City in 2009).

A few years later, Vito reached out to Community Options, Inc. Founder, Robert Stack. Community Options, Inc. is a national nonprofit organization that provides housing and employment support to people with disabilities.

“Community Options supports persons with profound intellectual and developmental disabilities,” said Community Options, Inc. President and CEO, Robert Stack. “Our homes use the same model of care and service delivery throughout the country. Located in typical neighborhoods staffed by people hired and trained from that local community, we have no more than four people per home designed to meet their needs.”

The two exchanged conversation in hopes that Vito could place his son in one of their group homes.

On January 10, 2011, Billy moved into his new home in Syracuse, NY with the Community Options family. Over the last three years, he has flourished as an individual. He is a volunteer at Meals on

Wheels, Thrifty Shopper and Humane Society. Billy goes to restaurants, loves going to the theater for movies and fishing on Oneida Lake. He can often be found hanging out with his best friend, Chris. When asked recently if there was anything Billy wanted, he responded, “to have friends and go out in the community.”

Presently, there has been a lot of national discussion regarding people with developmental disabilities who are cared for out-of-state, with people calling for their returns. Through an initiative called “Return Home New Jersey”, the Division of Developmental Disabilities is working with individuals who live in out-of-state residential facilities, and their families. The goal is to develop community-based residential options, services and supports for them in New Jersey. New Jersey followed suit and enacted “Billy’s Law” to help protect their citizens several years ago.

“Thirty years ago, these folks had very limited options,” said Stack. “Now, with our technology and through partnerships with government, people with disabilities have much greater opportunities. All of our facilities regardless of location are similar to each other. During the last 26 months, we have returned almost a dozen people from out-of-state facilities to small homes in New Jersey.”

“People with disabilities live a better life, with better care, as well as higher standards in a smaller environment with greater choices, than they do in a large, congregate facility.~I am certain that moving back to New Jersey can be very stressful and difficult for the families. I also know that now, at this time, there is a tremendous opportunity here for parents to push for a higher level of quality services closer to where they live that are better than where their son or daughter are living now.”

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For over 25 years, Community Options has developed housing and employment programs for people with disabilities. Currently the 5th largest non-profit in New Jersey, Community Options operates with a budget over \$96 million and serves thousands of people with disabilities through 38 offices across 8 states. Providing advocacy assistance to empower people with disabilities, Community Options believes that all people –regardless of disability level – should live and work in the community with dignity, choice, and self-determination. A registered PVO with USAID, Community Options is also the pioneer of innovative programs for people with disabilities in the Middle East, Russia, and South America. Please visit our website at [www.comop.org](http://www.comop.org).

CEO available for comment. If you would like more information about this topic, or to schedule an interview, please call (609) 352-5280 or e-mail Kathryn at [Kathryn.Sampson@comop.org](mailto:Kathryn.Sampson@comop.org).