

**Adopting The “ThinkDIFFERENTLY” Initiative For Ulster County,
And Calling On All Ulster County Towns, Villages And The City Of
Kingston To Adopt The “ThinkDIFFERENTLY” Initiative To Assist
And Support Individuals With Special Needs And Their Families**

Referred to: Health, Human Services and Housing Committee (Chairman Uchitelle and Legislators Corcoran, Erner, Lopez, Nolan, Petit, and Stewart)

Legislators Gina Hansut and Megan Sperry and Legislators Corcoran, Erner, Fabiano, Litts, Lopez, Nolan, Petit, Roberts, Ronk, and Stewart offer the following:

WHEREAS, our state and communities are stronger because of our diversity and differences; and

WHEREAS, according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) over 55 million people, or approximately 19% of Americans, have a type of disability or special need; and

WHEREAS, for some people with special needs, the very things that make them unique can also keep them on the sidelines, separate from those who might not understand their differences or uniqueness; and

WHEREAS, in 2015 Dutchess County launched the “ThinkDIFFERENTLY” initiative seeking to change the way individuals, businesses, and communities relate to our neighbors with special needs; and

WHEREAS, through their success, they have inspired more than fifty municipalities throughout New York State to develop their own “ThinkDIFFERENTLY” efforts; and

WHEREAS, the “ThinkDIFFERENTLY” initiative is about promoting awareness and acceptance of all people, and advocating for the inclusion of all individuals living on the Autism Spectrum and with special needs; and

WHEREAS, the goal of this initiative is to provide a supportive and inclusive environment for individuals of all abilities by supporting community events that expand family friendly opportunities for people with special needs and their families; and

WHEREAS, it is important to promote and provide guidance to those with special needs on how to access publicly supported services available to them in the community; and

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WHEREAS, it is important to encourage and educate the community and businesses on ways they can make facilities and services more accessible and on how to train staff to welcome and support special needs customers and co-workers; and

WHEREAS, “ThinkDIFFERENTLY” is a call to action and a genuine challenge to look past our differences and treat others the way we would hope to be treated; and

WHEREAS, an individual can “ThinkDIFFERENTLY” by focusing on the abilities of each person rather than being concerned about their disability; and

WHEREAS, a business can “ThinkDIFFERENTLY” by changing the way they welcome a customer that may be differently abled and/or have sensory issues into their establishment; and

WHEREAS, a community can “ThinkDIFFERENTLY” by taking the needs of residents of all abilities into consideration when making planning decisions, all with the goal of providing a more supportive environment; and

WHEREAS, this year, for the first time in its history, the Ulster County Fair introduced “The Sensory Safe Space” at the fairgrounds, a dedicated room designed to be a sensory-safe environment offering families a break from the bright lights, noise, and crowds outside; and

WHEREAS, although that was a significant step forward, formally adopting the “ThinkDIFFERENTLY” initiative is an important statement that our County, Towns, Villages and City of Kingston officials, business owners and residents can make to show their support for the differently-abled children and adults with special needs, and their families; now, therefore be it

RESOLVED, that Ulster County Legislature adopts the “ThinkDIFFERENTLY” initiative for Ulster County; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that the Ulster County Legislature requests that the County Executive make widely available to the public information on support services and resources available to individuals with special needs and their families, as well as proactive steps that can be taken by individuals, businesses and communities to “ThinkDIFFERENTLY” and embrace, and support residents of all abilities including, but not limited to:

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- Seeking and applying for funding for projects featuring accessible infrastructure beyond traditional ramps, curb cuts, etc. which increase residents’ access to facilities and resources throughout the county;
- Partnering with local movie theaters to sponsor free or discounted movies to families with children with special needs, lowering the volume and raising the lights inside the theater to accommodate children with sensory issues;
- Educating law enforcement officers, corrections officers, 911 dispatchers and first responders in Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) and Mental Health First Aid, enabling them to effectively interact with individuals in crisis, including those with special needs;
- Hosting events for children with special needs and their families, to connect them with local agencies and organizations that serve residents with special needs;
- Partnering with local centers for Autism services such as Arc Mid-Hudson, and other organizations serving the disability community such as RCAL and Gateway, to provide “Autism Supportive Environment” training, which teaches local businesses and community groups how to communicate better with and provide a more welcoming environment for residents with autism;
- Hosting a “ThinkDIFFERENTLY Dash” (a walk/run), Parade, or other event for residents with special needs to raise awareness and increase community support; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that Ulster County Legislature urges all Ulster County Towns, Villages, the city of Kingston, and all residents and business owners to adopt the “ThinkDIFFERENTLY” initiative so that all are better prepared to communicate with, provide for, and support those living on the Autism Spectrum and with special needs; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that the Clerk of the Ulster County Legislature shall forward copies of this resolution to County Executive Jen Metzger, Clerks of all Ulster County Towns, Villages and the City of Kingston, and the Ulster County Chamber of Commerce,

and move its adoption.

