



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Robert G. Ortt

## Ortt, Jacobs, Morinello and Dutchess County Executive Team up for ThinkDIFFERENTLY Awareness Campaign

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**LEWISTON** – In a joint effort to promote social acceptance and inclusiveness of individuals of all abilities, State Senator Rob Ortt (R,C,I – North Tonawanda), Senator Chris Jacobs and Assemblyman Angelo Morinello today teamed up with Dutchess County Executive Marc Molinaro for his ThinkDIFFERENTLY campaign.

Launched by Molinaro in 2015, the community-wide ThinkDIFFERENTLY initiative aims to break down barriers and support those living with autism and other developmental or intellectual disabilities. The campaign promotes community inclusiveness by encouraging elected leaders, neighborhoods, businesses, and organizations to think differently about how they interact with individuals with special needs.

**Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Senate Committee Chairman Senator Ortt said,**

“This campaign draws attention to mental health disorders and disabilities while encouraging open dialogue and eliminating stigma in communities. It challenges elected officials and community members to think differently about those who are differently abled. I’m proud to work with County Executive Molinaro and my colleagues in the legislature to help promote awareness, education and social acceptance in Western New York through the ThinkDIFFERENTLY campaign.”

Friday’s ThinkDIFFERENTLY event brought together people with developmental disabilities and their families, experts from provider agencies, local and state officials, and other professionals from various local agencies that specialize in services for those with special needs. The campaign encourages collaboration between organizations and community leaders to find new ways to embrace, support, and respect individuals with disabilities.

**Dutchess County Executive Molinaro said,** “I’ve been thrilled by the response to our ‘ThinkDIFFERENTLY’ efforts over the past two years, and I appreciate the cities, towns and villages throughout our state which have accepted our call to change hearts and minds. I thank Sen. Ortt for his willingness to ‘ThinkDIFFERENTLY’ to ensure every individual of every ability has a community that welcomes them and supports them.”

“Education is the key to growing understanding and increasing acceptance of individuals with developmental disabilities,” **said Senator Chris Jacobs.** “I want to applaud County

Executive Molinaro and thank him for bringing the ThinkDIFFERENTLY initiative to Western New York so we may all benefit from learning how to better embrace residents of all abilities.”

**Assemblyman Angelo J. Morinello (R,C,I,Ref – Niagara Falls) said,** “I am grateful to Dutchess County Executive Marc Molinaro for bringing this innovative initiative to Western New York. The program is more about the way we think than what we do. I urge the Western New York community to embrace the initiative and begin to Think Differently.”

“Kudos to Senator Ortt, County Executive Marc Molinaro and our other local leaders for taking the lead in this vitally important effort,” **said Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center President & CEO Joseph A. Ruffolo.** “Day after day at Memorial’s Golisano Center for Community Health, our work with people who have autism spectrum disorder and other developmental and intellectual disabilities reinforces the importance of social acceptance. They tell us ‘we don’t want to be treated special. All we ask is to be included -- just as anybody else would expect to be.’ We endorse the ‘ThinkDIFFERENTLY’ initiative and encourage others to embrace it.”

**People Inc.’s Associate Vice President Mary Petrakos said,** “This campaign falls in line with People Inc.’s commitment to foster independence, dignity and respect for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in an inclusive community. We’re thrilled to support Senator Ortt and County Executive Molinaro in their efforts that we believe will allow these individuals to gain a greater sense of confidence and accomplishment.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, recent estimates in the U.S. show about one in six children, ages three through 17, have one or more developmental disability.

The ThinkDIFFERENTLY campaign is a continuation of Senator Ortt's ongoing efforts to strengthen the state's laws and support of people with disabilities. This initiative builds on his commitment as the chairman of the State Senate Committee on Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities to ensure that the well-being of one of the most vulnerable populations is protected.