



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

John W. Mannion

## Senator John W. Mannion Surprises Special Olympics Athlete Kayla McKeon with News of USA Games Selection

JOHN W. MANNION May 17, 2021



SYRACUSE, NY – Senator John W. Mannion (D-Geddes) today had the honor of notifying Kayla McKeon of North Syracuse that she’s earned a spot on Team New York competing in bocce at the Special Olympics USA Games 2022 at Disney World in Orlando, FL.

The competition is highly prestigious and is only held once every four years. Team New York will include 115 athletes and coaches in six 6 sports: Bocce, Golf, Gymnastics, Powerlifting, Swimming and Track & Field.

A video of the surprise is [available here](#).

“Kayla and the entire McKeon family embody the best of Central New York and I know they will proudly represent the Empire State at the Special Olympics USA Games in 2022,” said Senator Mannion. “There is no finer organization in the state than Special Olympics New York. I am proud to partner with Special Olympics New York to promote inclusion and empower our young people – with and without disabilities - to end stereotypes through Unified Sports.”

“Competing at the national level is a distinguished honor we are only able to offer to a fraction of our deserving athletes. USA Games competitors are the best of the best and we’re proud to count Kayla among them,” said Special Olympics New York President & CEO Stacey Hengsterman. “We are thrilled to share this magical moment with Senator Mannion, who is a true champion for people with disabilities. Thanks to he and his colleagues in the Legislature, we can continue to grow the Special Olympics New York Unified Sports program in schools across the state.”

Kayla has been a Special Olympics New York athlete since the age of 13. She competes in track and field, softball, bowling, soccer, bocce, floor hockey and basketball. Kayla participated in Special Olympics World Games in Athens in 2011, where she won silver and bronze medals.

Kayla is also the first-ever registered lobbyist with Down syndrome. She serves as the Manager of Grassroots Advocacy with the National Down Syndrome Society. Her legislative successes include major revisions to the federal Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act.

Senator Mannion also announced \$150,000 in state funding to help expand Special Olympics New York's Unified Champion Schools program. The program uses sports as a catalyst to provide opportunities for students with and without intellectual disabilities to compete alongside one another. Working in partnership with the New York State Public High School Athletic Association, the program blends educational-based programming and high school athletics to promote inclusiveness, inspire youth leadership and encourage whole school engagement.

There are approximately 250 Unified Champion Schools across the state supporting more than 8,000 student athletes who lead their school's unified activities.

### **About Special Olympics USA Games**

The 2022 Special Olympics USA Games is scheduled for June 5-12, 2022 in Orlando, Florida. Jersey Mike's Subs is the Presenting Partner and Walt Disney World Resort is host. During this magical week, more than 5,500 athletes and coaches from all 50 states and the Caribbean will travel to Florida to unite in one of the country's most cherished sporting events. The USA Games is hosted once every four years and showcases 20 Olympic-style team and individual sports and 30 events throughout the week including forums and VIP receptions. Learn more at: [www.2022usagames.org](http://www.2022usagames.org)

### **About Special Olympics New York**

Special Olympics New York is the largest state chapter in the country, serving more than 68,000 athletes across New York with year-round sports training, athletic competition, and health screenings. All Special Olympics New York programs are offered at no cost to athletes, their families or caregivers. The organization has earned the Platinum Seal of Transparency from GuideStar.com, making it one of the most trusted charities in the business nationally. For additional information about Special Olympics New York, to learn more about getting

involved, or to make a donation, visit [www.specialolympicsNY.org](http://www.specialolympicsNY.org).

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PHOTO CAPTION: Senator John W. Mannion (D-Geddes) and Special Olympics New York President Stacey Hengsterman present a proclamation to Kayla McKeon of North Syracuse after notifying her she earned a spot on the Special Olympics New York team competing at the USA Games at Disney World in 2022. Credit: Office of Senator John W. Mannion