



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Steven D. Rhoads

## Senator Rhoads, Medical Experts, and Advocates Formally Recognize June as Aphasia Awareness Month in New York State

STEVEN D. RHOADS June 7, 2023



On Sunday, June 4, New York State Senator Steve Rhoads joined medical experts and local advocates to formally recognize June as Aphasia Awareness Month in New York State with the unanimous passage of his New York State Senate resolution J696. Aphasia is a disorder that results from damage to portions of the brain that are responsible for language. Aphasia usually occurs suddenly, often following a stroke or head injury, but it may also develop slowly, as the result of a brain tumor or a progressive neurological disease. The disorder impairs the expression and understanding of language as well as reading and writing. In addition to the Senate resolution, Senator Rhoads announced that Nassau County Executive Bruce Blakeman will be lighting the Nassau County Legislative Building up grey in June for Aphasia Awareness

Month. Senator Rhoads also announced that the LIU Post Aphasia Center, the only one of its kind in the New York area, will be hosting an Aphasia Awareness Open House on June 28<sup>th</sup>, where people from all across Long Island will be able to learn more about Aphasia, get their questions answered, and help individuals with Aphasia get the resources they need to live a better life.

Senator Rhoads was joined by Matthew Weingartner, a 35 year old from Salisbury who lives with Aphasia. Matthew had a stroke on April 18, 2018, and as a result of his stroke, has been left with Aphasia. Matthew has said the only way to describe Aphasia is to imagine understanding what people are saying to you, and knowing what you want to say back to them, but not being able to get the words out. Matthew finds value in sharing his story to raise awareness about Aphasia and to make others feel supported and seen. While Matthew's life has changed, he feels it's a positive change; it has taught Matthew how precious life is and to never to give up no matter your circumstance. It is Matthews hope that one day his speech will be fluid enough for him to be a motivational speaker. His dream is that one day it will be a medical breakthrough to allow him and others like him to regain movement in their hand and fingers.

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*"Aphasia is a loss of language, but not a loss of intellect. The fact that there are 2 million individuals, many of whom are suffering in silence because they are unaware of the resources available for help, presented a tremendous opportunity to do so much good. Matthew Weingartner serves as inspiration to others to remain positive and strong in their healing journey and highlights the importance of increasing visibility of Aphasia at the local, State and National levels. I was happy to spearhead this effort and look forward to working with Matthew Weingartner to continue to raise awareness about Aphasia in the future," said Senator Rhoads.*

"Thank you Senator Rhoads for all your help in Albany and for passing the resolution declaring Aphasia Awareness Month in New York State. The bottom line is we want to focus on raising awareness about Aphasia and highlight the services available at Hofstra and LIU," **said Matthew Weingartner.**

"Matthew's story and journey, from heart attack, stroke, and Aphasia inspires us all. This proclamation by the New York State Senate makes the public aware of just what Aphasia is and most importantly, it informs us that there are services available. Aphasia victims and their

families are not alone,” said **Harvey Sackowitz (Matthew Weingartner’s family friend)**

“It is something nobody knows about. There needs to be awareness. Matthew has been nothing but positive since day one. He wants to make sure young people and old know where to go for help. This is only the beginning,” said **Wayne Weingartner (Matthew Weingartner’s father)**

“Matthew Weingartner has what it takes to succeed as a young ambassador for Aphasia advocacy in New York State and beyond. Aphasia is a language disorder that affects a person's ability to communicate. Matthew has already proven to us during his recovery that he has the commitment, perseverance, grit, and motivation to get things done,” said **Wendy Silverman Clinic Director of Speech-Language-Hearing at Hofstra University School of Health Professionals and Human Services.**

“The Ladge Speech and Hearing Center at LIU Post is honored to play a part in promoting Aphasia Awareness. It is a cause that we hold dear and our involvement aligns with our mission to provide a superior learning and mentoring experience for our students, while offering quality patient care. We are committed to assisting each individual in achieving his or her maximum potential in functional skills for day-to-day living. Our Aphasia Center exemplifies these values and we very much look forward to hosting our inaugural Aphasia Awareness Open House at the Ladge Speech and Hearing Center (located on the first floor of Post Hall) on Wednesday, June 28 from 10am-12pm. This open house will provide an opportunity for the public to view first-hand what services are available to those who have been diagnosed with Aphasia, and to witness the community that is available to them. As Senator Rhodes stated in his press conference, most people in America (85% of the public, in fact) are unaware of what Aphasia is. This means that individuals who receive this diagnosis, following a stroke or brain injury, and their families can often feel a sense of isolation and not know where to turn. We are thrilled to have a small role in moving Aphasia Awareness forward, shedding a light on this diagnosis, and informing people regarding treatments that are available- and very importantly that they are not alone! We look forward to a world in which Aphasia is not a word shrouded in mystery, and where those affected by it feel supported and are readily aware of treatments and professionals who are available to help them,” said **Lori M. Newman, Clinical Director/Assistant Professor Communication Sciences and Disorders Department at LIU Post.**