



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 7, 2024

Contact:

Libby Vinson

Libby@absnj.com

609-577-1993

Executive Director of the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities Finalist for a 2024 Social Innovations Award

TRENTON, NJ—Mercedes Witowsky, Executive Director of the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities (NJCDD), has been nominated as a finalist for the [2024 Social Innovations Awards](#) for her leadership in helping make New Jersey one of just a handful of states in the nation to have a Legislative Disability Caucus. Her nomination is in the Legislative Impact category, which recognizes innovation through policy reform and improvements in financial models to improve service delivery and reduce barriers to care.

As leader of NJCDD, Ms. Witowsky was instrumental in working collaboratively with her colleagues in other organizations that support individuals with disabilities in the Garden State to create the mission, goals, and foundation of the New Jersey Legislative Disability Caucus. She then took the concept to former Senate President Steve Sweeney and other leaders in the Legislature where she worked with them to launch the Caucus in December 2020. Today, the bipartisan Caucus is chaired by Senate Majority Leader Teresa Ruiz, Assembly Majority Leader Lou Greenwald, Senate Republican Leader Anthony Bucco and Assemblywoman Aura Dunn, serving as forum within the New Jersey Legislature for lawmakers and their staff to consider the impact on the disability community when shaping all public policies in the Garden State.

At the four quarterly Caucus meetings each year, Ms. Witowsky and one of the Legislative Co-Chairs lead the discussion, which is focused on an important, timely topic like access to high-quality, affordable healthcare, housing, employment, and education. The intent of the meetings is to increase awareness and greater understanding of the complexities of the disability service system and issues affecting individuals with disabilities and their families, so policymakers can implement needed legislative and regulatory changes. Ms. Witowsky serves as a connector for the Caucus, positioning people with disabilities, their families and organizations that support and advocate for inclusion and equity as resources to the Caucus members and their staff.

The 2024 New Jersey Social Innovations Awards honor the region's most passionate social innovators, entrepreneurs and changemakers whose work and social impact too often goes unacknowledged, yet their efforts are what makes New Jersey communities a thriving

region of innovation and opportunity. The theme of the awards, “Achieving a More Just Society,” recognizes organic leadership who re-envision the challenges that communities face and who find innovative solutions to reshape communities. The purpose of the yearly award is to celebrate the social innovators who create change through innovative programs, policies, and by revolutionizing realities that bring us all forward to a more equitable and inclusive tomorrow -- today.

“The creation of a Legislative Disability Caucus in New Jersey had long been a goal of the NJCDD. Mercedes’ time and talent are, no doubt, what turned that goal into a reality. She embodies social innovation, and I cannot think of a more deserving recognition of her hard work and dedication,” said NJCDD Chairperson Paul Blaustein.

The final award winners are selected by voting. NJCDD stakeholders, partners and friends are encouraged to follow the instructions below to cast votes in all categories, but in particular, for Mercedes Witowsky, in the category of Legislative Impact. Public voting will end on Tuesday, March 12.

Click the link here to vote: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NJA2024>

For more information about the New Jersey Social Innovation Awards, visit: www.newjerseyinnovationawards.com/vote

###

About the NJCDD

The New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities (NJCDD) is a federally-mandated organization located in but not of the NJ Department of Human Services. NJCDD works to ensure individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families, participate in the design of and have access to needed community services, individualized supports, and other forms of assistance that promote self-determination, independence, productivity, integration and inclusion in all facets of life through culturally competent programs. Visit <https://njcdd.org/> for more information.