

CHAPTER 157

AN ACT establishing the New Jersey Multiple Sclerosis Task Force.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

1. The Legislature finds and declares that:

a. Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a chronic, often disabling disease that attacks the central nervous system, which is comprised of the brain, spinal cord, and optic nerves. It is a disease in which the body, through its immune system, launches a defensive and damaging attack against its own tissues. MS damages the nerve-insulating myelin sheath that surrounds and protects the brain. The damage to the myelin sheath slows down or blocks messages between the brain and the body;

b. Most people experience their first symptoms of MS between the ages of 20 and 40. MS symptoms can include visual disturbances, muscle weakness, trouble with coordination and balance, sensations such as numbness, prickling or “pins and needles,” and thought and memory problems. MS patients can also experience partial or complete paralysis, speech impediments, tremors, dizziness, stiffness and spasms, fatigue, paresthesias, pain, and loss of sensation;

c. The cause of MS remains unknown; however, having a first-degree relative, such as a parent or sibling, with MS significantly increases a person’s risk of developing the disease. According to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, it is estimated that there are approximately 250,000 to 350,000 persons in the United States who are diagnosed with MS. This estimate suggests that approximately 200 new cases are diagnosed each week;

d. Presently there is no cure for MS. While some scientists look for therapies that will affect the overall course of the disease, others search for new and better medications to control the symptoms of MS without triggering intolerable side effects; and

e. Therefore, it is in the public interest for the State to establish a Multiple Sclerosis Task Force in order to identify and address the unmet needs of persons with MS, and develop ways to enhance their quality of life.

2. a. There is established the New Jersey Multiple Sclerosis Task Force in the Department of Health and Senior Services.

The purpose of the task force shall be to:

(1) develop strategies to identify and address the unmet needs of persons with MS in order to enhance the quality of life of persons with MS by maximizing productivity and independence, and addressing emotional, social, and vocational challenges of persons with MS; and

(2) develop strategies to provide persons with MS greater access to various treatments and other therapeutic options that may be available.

b. The task force shall consist of 14 members as follows:

(1) the Commissioners of Health and Senior Services and Human Services, or their designees, who shall serve *ex officio*;

(2) eight public members, who shall be appointed by the Governor as follows: two neurologists licensed to practice medicine in this State; one person upon the recommendation of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society-New Jersey Metro Chapter; one person upon the recommendation of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society-Greater Delaware Valley Chapter; two persons who represent agencies that provide services or support to individuals with MS in this State; and two persons who have MS; and

(3) four public members with demonstrated expertise in issues relating to the work of the task force, one each to be appointed by the President of the Senate, the Senate Minority Leader, the Speaker of the General Assembly, and the Assembly Minority Leader. Vacancies in the membership of the task force shall be filled in the same manner provided for the original appointments.

c. The task force shall organize within 120 days following the appointment of a majority of its members and shall select a chairperson and vice-chairperson from among the members. The chairperson shall appoint a secretary who need not be a member of the task force.

d. The public members shall serve without compensation, but shall be reimbursed for necessary expenses incurred in the performance of their duties and within the limits of funds available to the task force.

e. The task force shall be entitled to call to its assistance and avail itself of the services of the employees of any State, county or municipal department, board, bureau, commission or agency as it may require and as may be available to it for its purposes.

f. The task force may meet and hold hearings as it deems appropriate.

g. The Department of Health and Senior Services shall provide staff support to the task force.

3. The task force shall report its findings and recommendations to the Governor, and to the Legislature pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), along with any legislative bills that it desires to recommend for adoption by the Legislature, no later than 12 months after the initial meeting of the task force.

4. This act shall take effect immediately and shall expire upon the issuance of the task force report.

Approved January 5, 2012.