

# Center for Disability Rights, Inc.

July 30, 2009

Majority Leader Dan Quatro  
Monroe County Legislature  
410 County Office Building  
39 West Main Street  
Rochester, NY 14614

VIA FAX: (585) 753-1932

Dear Mr. Quatro:

This is to follow up on our statement issued in connection with yesterday's News 10 NBC report on anti-disability hate speech used at a recent meeting of the Monroe County Legislature.

Video and audio records seem to indicate that you said "Jesus... Retard" in response to a vote cast by a Democratic legislator. In response to the News 10 report, you stated that you "have absolutely no recollection of saying anything like that." When questioned further by News 10, you said, "I'm convinced it's not me and I'm content to move along." Refusing to even ask which Republican lawmaker made the remark, you said, "I really don't think it's that important an issue to bring into my caucus and interrogate them on it." Dismissal of this offense as unimportant is adding further insult to the initial injury.

The Center for Disability Rights is appalled that such hateful language would be used by an elected official and your decision to ignore the issue is unacceptable. People with disabilities have suffered for decades as victims of hate speech, which perpetuates negative stereotypes and undermines opportunities for equal participation in our communities. For people with disabilities, the "R-word" is equally as offensive as slurs commonly known and thoroughly rejected for African-Americans, Hispanics, Jews and women. Elected officials and media personalities who have used offensive terms for these groups have frequently found themselves the subject of protests, demands for resignation, and terminations of employment.

Advocates with disabilities across the state and nation have been working hard to eliminate the use of the R-word in all its forms. In Rochester, dozens of advocates protested the opening of the movie *Tropic Thunder* for its frequent and malicious use of the R-word. Across New York, advocates are attempting to pass legislation to rename the NYS Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities to be the NYS Office of Developmental Disability Services.

It is intolerable for a county legislator to use such a blatant anti-disability slur. If you yourself spoke the words on the tape, you owe our entire community a full written public apology. But your obligation as a representative of all residents in your district, and all residents of Monroe County, does not end with a simple denial or failure to remember.

As Majority leader, you must call for the Republican legislator who uttered those words to take responsibility for this insult and apologize fully.

In addition, you must work to ensure that this type of hate speech does not poison our County Legislature again by arranging diversity training focused on the issues facing people with disabilities. The Center for Disability Rights would be happy to work with other local disability groups to provide this training to you and your colleagues. It should not escape the awareness of elected officials that we are the largest minority group, with numbers exceeding all other segments of the population according to the U.S. Census.

We will anticipate your prompt response no later than August 5, 2009.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Chris Hilderbrant".

Chris Hilderbrant  
Director of Advocacy