



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Jeremy Barewin
Vice President, Marketing & Community Engagement
Cell: 773. 841.5288
jeremy.barewin@nmss.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Wednesday, March 20, 2013

MS ACTIVISTS CONVERGE ON SPRINGFIELD TO ADVOCATE FOR CREATION OF STATEWIDE MS TASK FORCE AND MEDICAID EXPANSION

SPRINGFIELD, Ill.—MS activists from across Illinois converged on the statehouse today to meet with their local representatives and policy leaders to push for legislation to improve the lives of people living with multiple sclerosis and other disabilities, including the creation of an MS Task Force (SB1640) and Medicaid Expansion (SB26). The meetings are part of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Greater Illinois Chapter's MS Action Day 2013, which coincides with MS Awareness Month, a month-long initiative by the Chapter to increase statewide public awareness through educational programs and services, fundraising and activism.

"Living with a chronic condition and disability such as multiple sclerosis can be a great challenge," said Greater Illinois Chapter President John Blazek. "For our MS activists and the 20,000 individuals and their family members across the state affected by MS, coming together to meet with our policy leaders is a critical step to assuring that all people living with a disability gain access to the health care coverage that they deserve."

Among the bills that the Greater Illinois Chapter is lobbying for is the establishment of the **Illinois Multiple Sclerosis Task Force (SB1640)** – a partnership between state government, medical professionals and MS activists dedicated to identifying and addressing unmet needs of persons with MS. Sponsors include Senate President John Cullerton (D-6th district), Sen. Linda Holmes (D-42nd district), and Rep. Ann Williams (D-11th district). The Task Force would develop strategies to provide persons with MS greater access to treatments and other therapeutic options and would also facilitate interaction between medical, government and non-profit communities.

The Greater Illinois Chapter is also seeking support for **Medicaid Expansion (SB26)**, which would help insure that more Illinoisans, including people with MS and other disabilities, gain access to affordable, comprehensive health care coverage. Currently, 70 percent of individuals with MS report difficulty paying for their health care and 60 percent of those with MS exit the workforce within 10-years of their diagnosis, which often leads to losing access to employee-based health coverage. Expanding Medicaid will bring over \$12 billion in federal funds into Illinois over eight years, leading to job creation and economic expansion.

The Greater Illinois Chapter had two major legislative successes in 2012, including the passage of **Public Act 097-0866: Safe Patient Handling in Nursing Homes**, which provides assistance to nursing homes with the adoption of policies to control risk of injuries to both residents and health care workers through evaluation, training and creation of "safe lifting teams." With the implementation of best-practices and creation of these teams, needless injuries can be avoided, promoting better quality of life for residents, increased safety of nursing home staff and significant reductions in healthcare costs.

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Public Act 097—1152: Gas Station Accessibility, was also passed into law during the fall Veto Session, amending the Motor Fuel Sales Act, giving people with disabilities greater access at gasoline service stations within the community. The new legislation requires gas stations to post a phone number of the station directly onto one gas pump to make it easier for people with disabilities to communicate with gas station employees. HB4866 imposes minimal financial obligations on gas stations while creating an increased consumer base. Stations not in compliance are subject to financial penalty.

For more information about being an MS activist, visit the Greater Illinois Chapter website at MSIllinois.org, send an email to AdvocacyIllinois@nmss.org or call 1.800.344.4867.

The National MS Society addresses the challenges of each person affected by MS. To fulfill this mission, the Society funds cutting-edge research, drives change through advocacy, facilitates professional education, collaborates with MS organizations around the world, and provides programs and services designed to help people with MS and their families move forward with their lives. In the past year alone, through its national office and 50-state network of chapters, the Society devoted \$164 million to programs and services that assisted more than one million people. To move us closer to a world free of MS, the Society also invested \$40 million to support more than 325 new and ongoing research projects around the world. The Society is dedicated to achieving a world free of MS.

The Greater Illinois Chapter mobilizes people and resources to drive research for a cure and to address the challenges of everyone affected by MS. Envisioning a world free of MS, the Chapter moves toward that end by driving change through advocacy, facilitating education, collaborating with others and by providing helpful programs and services. For more information, visit MSIllinois.org.

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