

# 2007 Public Citizen of the Year

## Paige Pierce



Paige Pierce is a champion of consumer rights and staunch advocate on behalf of children and families dealing with mental illness. Her most prominent work has been in the fight to establish mental health parity in New York State, more commonly known as Timothy's Law. The Timothy's Law Coalition is comprised of numerous human service agencies, mental health providers, and professional organizations including NASW-NYS. As Co-Chair of the Timothy's Law Coalition, along with Timothy's father Tom O'Clair, Paige has helped lead the coalition in its grassroots initiatives to create public awareness about the need for parity as well as in negotiations with the Senate, Assembly, and Executive Chamber. The Senate and Assembly have reached a historic bipartisan agreement on Timothy's Law, which has been passed in both houses.

When signed into law, Timothy's Law will provide New Yorkers who have mental illnesses greater and more affordable access to the mental health treatment they need. This action is closer to becoming a reality than ever before due in large part to Paige's tenacity and leadership.

*Putting the Power of Social Work in Action* is what NASW-NYS promotes to empower social workers to use their experience and expertise and be a voice for change on behalf of those who have no voice. Paige Pierce does just that, personifying the most fundamental aspect of social work... advocacy. Paige's entrée into the realm of education, empowerment, and advocacy stems from personal experience. After Paige's son was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, she encountered profound gaps in care, along with the stigma associated with mental disorders. She became an advocate for her son and through that work become an expert in children's mental health issues and is often called upon by the media throughout the state to comment on such.

Since 2000 Paige has been the Executive Director for Families Together in NYS, a non-profit, family-run organization designed to advocate for children and youth with emotional and behavioral difficulties. FTNYS provides training and technical assistance; a toll-free information and referral help line; quarterly newsletters and other publications, family support, and advocacy. She originally joined Families Together in the spring of 1999, as its Public Policy Director.

"Under her leadership, Families Together in New York State, Inc., has become a prominent, leading organization in New York State representing children and youth with emotional, behavioral and social challenges. Working from her perspective as the parent of a child with special needs, Paige uses this experience to guide Families Together forward in a manner that appropriately represents the needs and desires of families in similar situations statewide."

-Glenn Liebman, CEO for the Mental Health Association in New York State, Inc. (MHANYS)

Pierce also serves as Chair of several committees and coalitions, and forges alliances with a wide range of stakeholders. Paige earned her BA degree at Skidmore College in 1987. She is the mother of four children.