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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Independence Care System and New York Lawyers for the Public Interest Today Release a Report Calling on Medical Providers and State and Local Policymakers to Ensure Medical Facilities are Accessible to Women with Disabilities

Report Spurs City Council to Act; Committees to Hold Oversight Hearing Tomorrow Regarding Access to Mammography and Other Health Services for Women with Disabilities

New York, New York, October 23, 2012- A report released today by Independence Care System (ICS) and New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI), entitled "*Breaking Down Barriers, Breaking the Silence: Making Health Care Accessible for Women with Disabilities*" (*Breaking Down Barriers* available at www.nylpi.org/BreakingBarriers) reveals that medical facilities across New York City provide unequal and inaccessible care for people with disabilities. Barriers to health care disproportionately affect women with disabilities. These barriers can lead to particularly grave consequences, including delayed or missed diagnoses of breast or cervical cancers. Today, NYLPI and ICS are joined in their call to make all NYC medical facilities equally accessible to women with disabilities by, the Speaker of the City Council, Christine Quinn; Chair of the Women's Issues Committee, Council Member Ferreras; and, Chair of the Mental Health, Mental Retardation, Alcoholism, Drug Abuse and Disability Services Committee, Councilmember Koppell.

"I thank New York Lawyers for the Public Interest and Independence Care System for this comprehensive, eye-opening report. As a result of their work, the Council will hold a hearing on medical accessibility for women with disabilities on October 24. The Council will also work to implement the report's recommendations in an effort to improve access to health care services for New Yorkers with disabilities. Working together, we can lessen the barriers that stand between so many New Yorkers and the care they need," said City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn.

Startlingly, women with disabilities have the same incidence of breast cancer as women without disabilities, yet they are nearly one-third more likely to die from it. "Statistics show us that women with physical disabilities don't get the health care they need and that they're in danger of later diagnosis, poorer treatment, and untimely death from cancers that we know how to treat," said Marilyn E. Saviola, Vice President of Advocacy and the Women's Health Access Program. "It is late in the health care game to finally be addressing this crucial issue, but the health of people with disabilities has suffered for far too long. It's time to make health care accessible throughout New York City."

"As the report we released today reveals, healthcare providers in New York City have long been legally required to make their services equally accessible to people with disabilities," said Kelly McAnnany, Co-Director of the Disability Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest. "We have heard from countless New Yorkers with disabilities who have faced discrimination as they tried to access a range of healthcare services. With Speaker Quinn and the City Council's leadership and commitment, we are hopeful that soon New Yorkers with disabilities will have access to the life-saving cancer screenings to which they are entitled."

Whether the result of stairs blocking a clinic entrance, the absence of an adjustable examination table, or the refusal to provide a sign language interpreter, New Yorkers with disabilities encounter enormous

barriers when seeking comprehensive, quality health care services. These barriers exist in facilities of all sizes, including hospitals, community clinics, and doctor's offices, in contravention of laws that mandate equal access for people with disabilities. *Breaking Down Barriers* looks specifically at an advocacy project developed by Independence Care System and implemented in four medical facilities in the city that has started making cancer screening accessible.

Screening for cancer can mean the difference between life and death. "A mammogram is important because my mother had breast cancer and if I don't get that mammogram, I could get cancer and not know it. If I get the mammogram, maybe I could catch it in time. But I was told that I couldn't have a mammogram because of my size and the size of my wheelchair," said Esther Jones, a member of ICS. "I now have had two successful mammograms, which I never would have had without this ICS Project. Nothing suspicious was found—I was very relieved."

The accessibility improvements made through ICS's project at a handful of healthcare facilities demand replication. The report notes that New York City hospitals, clinics, and doctor's offices have an opportunity to take the lead nationwide in providing accessible health care, in compliance with applicable law, to all of their patients with disabilities. The report also calls on public and private medical providers and city and state policymakers to end healthcare disparities for people with disabilities. The City Council is taking a big step toward that goal tomorrow when the Committees on Health, Women's Issues, and Mental Health, Mental Retardation, Alcoholism, Drug Abuse and Disability Services Committee hold a joint hearing at 10:00 a.m. on "Access to Mammography and other Health Services for Women with Disabilities."

"October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, so I am glad the City Council will have the opportunity to raise public awareness about the issue of access to mammography and other health services for women with disabilities at our hearing on Wednesday," stated Council Member Ferreras, Chair of the Women's Issues Committee. "This is a civil rights issue of equal access to healthcare, and one that affects women in particular. I look forward to the testimony we will receive this week and working with Speaker Quinn to introduce policies that help ensure accessibility in New York's health care facilities."

Breaking Down Barriers recommends that the City Council pass a comprehensive resolution urging New York City hospitals and medical providers to comply with existing federal, state, and local disability anti-discrimination laws. The report also calls on the City Council to include funding in the budget, with terms and conditions, to assist capital improvements at HHC facilities that are designed to increase accessibility for people with disabilities, and to convene an annual oversight hearing on accessibility of medical services and needs of people with disabilities.

"I am proud to join Speaker Quinn, Council Members Arroyo and Ferreras, Independence Care System, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest and other advocacy organizations to highlight the release of this troubling report on the barriers women with physical disabilities face in accessing breast cancer screenings," said Council Member G. Oliver Koppell, chair of the Council's Committee on Mental Health, Mental Retardation, Alcoholism, Drug Abuse and Disability Services. "Breast cancer is a major public health concern for all women. Access to mammography screenings is a central aspect of women's health and an essential life-saving service. Women with disabilities have the right to receive vital health care screenings just as the non-disabled population. I look forward to exploring this issue further, as well as other obstacles women with disabilities face in receiving healthcare, with the Committee on Women's Issues at our joint hearing on October 24, 2012."

“Breaking Down Barriers exposes the pervasive inequality that exists in New Yorkers’ access to medical care, especially lifesaving cancer screenings for women with disabilities,” said Katherine Terenzi, Taconic Policy Fellow at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest. “We thank Speaker Quinn and the City Council for their commitment to ending barriers to medical care for all New Yorkers. The hearing tomorrow will be the first step towards achieving that goal.”

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About Independence Care System

Operating a nonprofit Medicaid managed long-term care program in New York City, Independence Care System was specifically designed to assist adults with physical disabilities to live independently and participate fully in community life. Serving Brooklyn, the Bronx and Manhattan, ICS has over 1,600 members; all are low-income, nearly two-thirds are women, 72% are Hispanic/Latina or African-American, and approximately 60% use wheelchairs. For more, go to www.icsny.org.

About New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) advances equality and civil rights, with a focus on health justice, disability rights and environmental justice, through the power of community lawyering and partnerships with the private bar. Through community lawyering, NYLPI puts its legal, policy and community organizing expertise at the service of New York City communities and individuals. NYLPI’s partnership with the private bar strengthens its advocacy and connects community groups and non-profits with critical legal assistance. NYLPI is the recipient of the 2010 New York Times Awards for Nonprofit Excellence.