

Governor Quinn Welcomes Athletes to the 44th Special Olympics Spring Games

Written by Leslie Wertheimer
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Opening Ceremonies Bring More than 3,000 Athletes to Soldier Field

CHICAGO – May 8, 2012. Governor Pat Quinn today welcomed Special Olympics Spring Games athletes to Soldier Field, the birthplace of the Special Olympics. The opening ceremonies will kick off three days of track and field events for more than 3,000 athletes. At the event, Governor Quinn emphasized his commitment to improve life for people with developmental and intellectual disabilities in Illinois and protect special education by repairing the pension and Medicaid systems this year.

“We are so proud of our Special Olympics athletes, who have helped make America a better country with their competitive spirit and talents,” Governor Quinn said. “All people should feel they can reach their potential in Illinois. That’s why we will continue to increase community care options for people with disabilities and we will take the necessary steps to protect funding for special education.”

Governor Quinn recently proposed bold plans to stabilize Illinois’ pension and Medicaid systems to preserve funding for programs such as special education. After decades of fiscal mismanagement, the Governor’s plans protect special education by repairing the pension and Medicaid systems this year by making the two programs sustainable - alleviating pressures on other areas of the budget, such as education and public safety.

Last month, the Governor received the Arc of Illinois 2012 President’s Award for his leadership to improve life for people with developmental disabilities by rebalancing Illinois’ approach to

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providing care. In November, Governor Quinn announced his commitment to rebalance Illinois' use of institutionalization for the care of people with developmental disabilities. Illinois lags behind the rest of the nation in the utilization of person-centered, community-based care. Community-based care has been proven to empower people with developmental disabilities to lead more active, dynamic lives.

The rebalancing initiative calls for a "person-centered approach," meaning individuals and their families will be a significant part of designing the program that best fits their needs and desires. Working with parents and guardians, individuals will be evaluated to determine their needs, desires and the best community care setting. As a result of the governor's rebalancing initiative, people with developmental disabilities are in the process of transitioning into community settings over the next two years.

The first Special Olympics Games were held at Soldier Field on July 20, 1968, with 1,000 athletes from the United States and Canada competing in aquatics and athletics. The city of Chicago, Chicago Park District, and the Eunice and the Joseph P. Kennedy Foundation launched the now-renowned program 44 years ago. More than 5,000 registered Special Olympics athletes live in the city of Chicago and there are more than 20,000 athletes in Illinois. Special Olympics training and competition programs are offered in more than 180 countries with more than 3.7 million athletes.

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