Republican Gubernatorial Candidate Charlie Baker visits Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts

Charlie Baker, Republican gubernatorial candidate, visited the Westborough office of the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts (BIA-MA) on Monday, May 19, 2014. He participated in a roundtable discussion with BIA-MA staff, board members, and survivors and discussed the issues that the brain injury population of Massachusetts faces daily.

Kelly Buttiglieri, Ambassador Program Coordinator BIA-MA, and Survivor, shared her story with Charlie. She was in an automobile accident in 1992 when a drug impaired driver hit her head on. Kelly was fortunate to have insurance that covered the needs of her care and was able to overcome many obstacles in her recovery. She often would take her law school books with her to therapy and work on her speech. Her “Can Do” attitude served her well as she was able to graduate from law school and pass the Bar Exam. This is not the case for many survivors. Charlie asked Kelly “What are you doing now?” She said “Knocking on doors and advocating for other survivors at the State House on a weekly basis.”

Barbara Webster, Support Group Leader Liaison for BIA-MA, and Survivor talked about how a car accident that happened on a slippery road derailed her daily life in many ways. Barbara’s injury was not obvious, she looked okay, but she was not able to manage most daily tasks such as grocery shopping for her family. Barbara became depressed but finally found out about the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts by chance after a presentation on bike safety at her son’s school. She had no idea that an organization existed that was specific to her type of injury. She
utilized the BIA-MA support groups and with much perseverance and cognitive therapy was able to get back most of what she had lost before her injury. She wanted to help other survivors, became a support group leader and then became a staff member at BIA-MA. Barbara wanted Charlie to know that survivors need long-term cognitive therapy in order to be able to reach their potential after their diagnosis and that there is a critical need for more case managers that are specific to brain injury.

The common thread of the stories that were shared was the crucial gaps in treatment of the survivors post-rehab. The views that were expressed to Charlie were that more Cognitive Therapy and Mental Health services need to be available for survivors. BIA-MA board member, Dr. Harold Wilkinson, Neurosurgeon, Massachusetts General Hospital, spoke about the fact more brain injury patients are surviving, but facing many obstacles in their recovery. “A major challenge for rehabilitation of patients with acquired brain injuries is the difference in the rate of recovery of brain injuries compared with other injuries. As a rule of thumb, patients with brain injuries make about one third of their recovery in the first six weeks and a second one third of their recovery in the first six months, but recovery commonly continues into the second and third year. Thus recovery is both slow and persistent. This means that a rehabilitation program limited in duration to one month, or even to six months, is too short and not consistent with the natural history of these injuries.”

Nicole Godaire, Executive Director, stated “The benefit of having the gubernatorial candidates for Massachusetts come to an organization like BIA-MA is that we can discuss the ongoing struggles in the lives of our survivors and caregivers. Sharing the success stories of our survivors shows that when proper care is administered to patients they can thrive in their community again.”

The Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts, a private, non-profit organization, provides support to brain injury survivors and their families, offers programs to prevent brain injuries, and educates the public on the risks and impact of brain injury. The Association advocates for funding for individuals with brain injury, supports legislation to prevent brain injuries, and collaborates on educational campaigns with state agencies and related associations.