

2020 Priorities

It is the **mission** of Disability Rights Rhode Island (DRRI) to assist Rhode Islanders with differing abilities in their efforts to achieve full inclusion in society and to exercise their civil and human rights through the provision of legal advocacy. DRRI employs various legal and advocacy strategies in the pursuit of its work, including litigation where appropriate.

DRRI administers nine federally funded programs, all of which have different purposes and requirements. Every year the agency establishes **priorities** to guide its work and provide a means for efficiently allocating its resources. Priorities are broken down into two categories: **systemic advocacy**, which advocates on behalf of the broader disability community, and **individual case representation**.

Information (including relevant agency publications) **and referrals** are provided to individuals who request assistance on disability-related issues outside of identified priority areas.

Legal and advocacy trainings on prioritized legal issues are available in response to requests made by organizations associated with the disability community, as resources permit.

For federal fiscal year 2020, DRRI has identified the following six (6) priority areas for its systemic work:

1. **Improve behavioral healthcare for prisoners with mental illness** in order to eliminate the use of solitary confinement.
 2. **Educate and train educators, advocates, judicial and governmental personnel, families, and individuals about implementation of new law on supported decision-making** for people with disabilities so that decision-making authority can be retained.
 3. **Promote implementation of new education law to ensure students who want and need special education and related services through the age of 22** have access to and receive those services.
 4. **Reduce unnecessarily prolonged hospitalization or other institutionalization of people with developmental and intellectual disabilities and/or behavioral health -**
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issues, addressing options and need for increased community-based services.

5. **Safeguard the rights of Social Security beneficiaries** whose benefits are paid to and managed by representative payees, pursuant to referrals by the Social Security Administration.
6. **Advance full participation in the electoral process** by persons with disabilities.

Individual case selection priorities for 2020 will be focused in six (6) areas as indicated below:

1. Safety and Guardianship

- a. Investigate reports of abuse and neglect, including at facilities and segregated schools; take legal action when necessary to protect victims of abuse and neglect.
- b. Represent a limited number of persons contesting a guardianship or the reasonableness of continuing a guardianship, a petition for guardianship, the scope of a guardianship, or the appointment of a particular person as a guardian, to provide assistance with supported decision-making or other forms of less restrictive decision-making.

2. Children's Education

- a. Represent students who face disability-related discrimination in a school setting, such as: students with behavioral health needs denied eligibility for special education; students whose rights are violated during restraint, and; students charged with truancy for disability-related reasons.

3. Assistive Technology

- a. Represent persons denied or incurring delays in acquiring technology devices or services from public funding sources such as Medicare, Medicaid, school districts, and vocational rehabilitation.
- b. Represent persons seeking to enforce the state Consumer Enforcement of Assistive Technology Device Warranties Act and Hearing Aid Dealers and Fitters Act.

4. Employment

- a. Represent persons denied or incurring delays in receiving appropriate vocational rehabilitation, employment network, or independent living services.
 - b. Represent persons in efforts to obtain appropriate Social Security Administration work incentives.
 - c. Represent persons denied reasonable accommodations in employment
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when those accommodations are necessary to maintain or advance in employment, and represent Social Security beneficiaries who are otherwise discriminated against in employment.

- d. Represent Social Security beneficiaries concerning work-related Social Security Administration matters or other issues that constitute a barrier to employment.

5. Housing and Community-Based Services

- a. Represent persons who remain in hospitals or other restrictive environments due to a shortage of appropriate community alternatives.
- b. Represent persons denied reasonable accommodations, or otherwise discriminated against, in housing.

6. Government and Public Accommodations

- a. Represent persons denied physical accessibility, policy modifications, or auxiliary communication aids and services by state or local governments.
- b. Represent persons denied physical accessibility, policy modifications, or auxiliary communication aids and services by schools, colleges, universities, and testing services.
- c. Represent persons denied physical accessibility, policy modifications, or auxiliary communication aids and services by health care providers.
- d. Represent persons denied full participation in the electoral process.

The following factors will be considered when determining acceptance of individual cases:

- Unavailability of effective alternative representation or resources.
- Availability of financial and staff resources.
- Strength of the evidence and legal grounds supporting the individual's claim.
- Inability of the individual, his/her parent(s), legal guardian, or interested person to advocate.
- Immediacy, severity, and duration of effect of the threatened harm to the individual.
- Increased vulnerability of the individual based on economic, social, or minority group status.
- Likelihood that a successful result in the individual's case will have a positive impact on other individuals.

While not all factors must be satisfied for a case to be accepted for representation, they do guide the allocation of limited resources most effectively within Rhode Island's disability community by avoiding duplication of services by other community organizations, assisting those who are most in need, and ensuring that the greatest number of individuals possible may realize benefits from our advocacy efforts.

Please note: Disability Rights Rhode Island makes every effort to serve the needs of individuals with disabilities but regrets that eligibility for services is not an entitlement. Our intake process is thorough and comprehensive in order to determine how we may best serve the greatest number of people with disabilities through limited resources.

We welcome your feedback. If you would like to provide input on our priorities, you may direct your comments via email to info@drri.org, or by regular mail to: Executive Director, Disability Rights Rhode Island, 33 Broad Street, Suite 601, Providence, RI 02903.

For additional information about Disabilities Rights Rhode Island, please visit our website at www.drri.org or contact us at 401-831-3150.
