



GCD: Governor's Council on Disability

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[Governor's Council on Disability](#)

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GCD UPDATE

by **Claudia Browner**

Since switching to remote work and virtual meetings, trainings, and events last year, we have all become more accustomed and comfortable with this new way of business and education. What first began with a lot of uncertainties, technical hiccups and difficulties, has now become a more familiar way of operating and conducting business. With the ongoing pandemic and concerns for the health and safety of our staff and program participants, the Governor's Council on Disability will continue to conduct meetings and programs in a virtual format for the foreseeable future.

An important consideration in providing virtual services and programs is the need for accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities to assure they can participate and enjoy the same opportunities as everyone else. In this issue, you will read about bridging the digital divide, the benefits of assistive technology, tips and tools for accessible online events, tips for legislative advocacy, the new format for the Legislative Education Project, and the Regional Leadership Forum.

We all look forward to returning to in-person events, meeting with people, and networking with colleagues to make new connections and form partnerships. Until then, we can all do our part to promote inclusion and accessibility for all.

GAINING INDEPENDENCE THROUGH ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

by **Caitlin Bartley, Department of Mental Health**

When you have a disability, independence means everything. Even completing small tasks on your own is exhilarating! I have Congenital Muscular Dystrophy, a neuromuscular disease that impacts my mobility and ability to perform basic daily living activities. So, I am constantly looking for new (and fun) ways to be independent—and I love assistive technology!

I live in a completely accessible house that has everything set up just like I need it. Still, I have been looking into some technology upgrades that could help me control my living environment. For Christmas, my mom and stepdad hooked me up with some Wi-Fi-enabled wall switches and electrical plugs. Via my smartphone, these switches and plugs allow me to turn my lights and ceiling fan on and off and have control of the power to my

heated mattress pad, aurora light, and disco ball. While flipping lights and appliances on and off may seem small, it's a big deal for me. Due to muscle weakness in my arms, I have always had to ask for help with these things. In addition, by having control of my mattress pad and ceiling fan, I can independently regulate my temperature at night, which has helped me to sleep much better. The independence these devices have given me means a lot—and it is so much fun to be able to turn things off and on by myself!

Photo: Caitlin Bartley, NCI Project Coordinator, Department of Mental Health

Referenced AT products: [Kasa Smart Plug-In Mini](#), [Wi-Fi Light Smart Switch](#)

VIRTUAL REGIONAL LEADERSHIP FORUM

by Rachel Rackers

The Governor's Council on Disability is accepting applications now until February 15th for the first virtual **Regional Leadership Forum**, held March 13 and 20, 2021!

Concerns about the ongoing pandemic and the health and wellbeing of our participants and staff have led us to the difficult decision to cancel our 2021 five-day Missouri Youth Leadership Forum, hosted annually by the Governor's Council on Disability and its partnering agencies. In addition, we have also canceled our four, one-day in person regional events that were scheduled for the spring.

As an alternative leadership training opportunity, the Missouri Youth Leadership Forum is excited to offer a **FREE, virtual Regional Leadership Forum** for high school students with disabilities (ages 16-21). Participants will have the opportunity to learn about leadership, career development, employment, goal setting, self-advocacy and independent living.

On two consecutive Saturdays, March 13 and March 20, 2021 participants will meet virtually with leaders in the disability community and hear from employers, mentors, alumni, and keynote speakers about the importance of goal setting, self-advocacy, and leadership. The event is open transition age high school students. Must be a Missouri resident to qualify.

Apply now and get more information at <https://disability.mo.gov/gcd/y/f.htm>.

For questions about the RLFs, please contact Rachel Rackers at Rachel.rackers@oa.mo.gov or 573-751-2600.

Please help us share this exciting opportunity with students, parents, teachers and colleagues!

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY DURING THE PANDEMIC

by Laura Mueth



With the beginning of the 2021 legislative session in January and the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic, our office has been actively working to find answers to the uncertainty of doing legislative advocacy in a time when many people are unable to travel to the Capitol to attend hearings or meet with legislators in-person in Jefferson City or in their districts.

Some of the options that existed prior to the pandemic are still in place. Citizens can call a legislator's office or send an email to share thoughts of how particular bills will impact their lives as well as to voice support or opposition. Many legislators maintain a social media presence. Postal mail is another option though it is not the most effective choice when time is of the essence. The contact information for each legislator can be found on their individual pages on the [House](http://house.mo.gov) (house.mo.gov) and [Senate](http://senate.mo.gov) (senate.mo.gov) websites.

If you desire to still meet with your legislators, many are participating in virtual visits with constituents over ZOOM and other virtual meeting software. For organizations which typically invite legislators to tour their locations, you might consider hosting a virtual tour.

The House [hearing](#) page contains a weekly list of scheduled hearings as does the Senate [hearing](#) page for Senate hearings. The House and Senate have provided the opportunity to listen to hearings and the daily chamber activities online. At this time, the Senate is limited to audio and captions are not provided. The House provides video and audio. Captions are provided for the House Chamber activities. The House provides the Chamber debate via the Message board on the [home page](#). The [Senate Chamber Debate](#) is available off the home page.

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The House and Senate are continuing to welcome individuals to provide testimony at hearings. However, seating is limited in the hearing rooms due to social distancing. If you do provide in-person testimony, you will most likely be asked to remove your mask while giving it.

Individuals are being encouraged to provide written testimony to the committees in lieu of providing in-person testimony. The Senate has established a [system](https://www.senate.mo.gov/senatewitnesssystem/) (<https://www.senate.mo.gov/senatewitnesssystem/>) for electronic submission of written testimony. All submissions must not exceed five pages and must be received an hour prior to the beginning of a hearing. The House will be establishing a similar system on their website.

The recently adopted [rules](https://www.house.mo.gov/billtracking/bills211/rules/rules.pdf) (<https://www.house.mo.gov/billtracking/bills211/rules/rules.pdf>) for the 101st House of Representatives contain provisions allowing for remote testimony by phone or video conference at the discretion of each committee. The logistics of this method are currently being worked on. The House Appropriations Subcommittees have decided to allow remote testimony. More information will be available at a later time.

The Senate [Appropriations](#) committee will not be holding public hearings for Governor Parson's budget recommendations. Any comments may be submitted in writing to individual committee members.

Should you choose to travel to the Capitol, all visitors must use the south entrance and will undergo screenings in the form of questions and a physical screening. Advocacy days can be scheduled and held. Groups may reserve the first floor rotunda for events but are asked to wear masks and maintain social distance as much as possible. The third floor rotunda, alcoves, and House Hearing Room 2 are not accepting reservations for the entirety of the legislative session.

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

by David Baker, Missouri Assistive Technology



As remote work, on-line schooling and similar modifications to daily life have occurred during the pandemic, considerable attention has been placed on the digital divide.

The term digital divide refers to the demographic and regional gaps between those who have access to modern information and communication technology and those who don't. In far too many cases, individuals with disabilities are on the wrong side of the divide.

One reason that individuals with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by the digital divide is lack of access to technology, assistive technology in particular. We live in a golden age of assistive technology in which numerous devices that "level the playing field" are available to individuals.

The mission of Missouri Assistive Technology (MoAT) is to help Missourians with disabilities and older Missourians increase access to and acquisition of assistive technology devices and services. The Telecommunication Access Program, iCanConnect Program and Show-Me Loans Program are but three examples of MoAT programs that are potential sources of devices to close the digital divide. For those new to assistive technology, MoAT staff are available to help you discover appropriate devices, uncover funding sources or provide training and other guidance on accessibility features. Additional information on programs and services visit [Missouri Assistive Technology's website](#).

The digital divide will not evaporate in the post-pandemic world as tele-medicine, on-line shopping, and similar strategies for adapting to the pandemic become commonplace. In response, it is important that people with disabilities and their advocates keep in mind that assistive technology is an important tool, while also advocating to see the digital divide eliminated through working to ensure internet access and accessible digital content.

Missouri Governor's Council on Disability Members

- Yvonne Wright, Chair, New Bloomfield
- Joan Bergstrom, Ed. D, Lee's Summit
- Charles Comstock, Kirksville
- Betty Davidson, Ph.D., St. Louis
- Ronald Hack, St. Louis
- Chip Hailey, Joplin
- Rosemary Hendon, West Plains
- Katie Jones, St. Charles
- Kim Lackey, St. Louis
- Elijah Mayfield, Jefferson City
- DeAnna Noriega, Columbia
- Susan Orton, Creve Coeur
- Andrew Sartorius, Jefferson City
- Lesia Shelton, Buffalo
- Opeoluwa Sotonwa, Jefferson City
- James Trout, St. Louis
- Robert Wallace, St. Louis

Missouri Governor's Council on Disability Staff Members

- Claudia Browner, Executive Director
- Laura Mueth, Senior Program Specialist
- Rachel Rackers, Senior Program Specialist
- Jessica Zimmer, Lead Administrative Support Assistant

LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION PROJECT Q&A

by Laura Mueth

After reading the legislative advocacy article on the previous pages, are you wondering how to find your way around the House and Senate websites?

*Navigating the House and Senate Websites** is one of the recorded modules offered as part of the [Legislative Education Project \(LEP\)](https://disability.mo.gov/gcd/LEP.htm).

It provides information on the layout of each of the websites and how to utilize various features.

If you have questions after watching the module, you are invited to schedule a Q&A session with Laura. She can be contacted at Laura.Mueth@oa.mo.gov

**Please note: All modules and videos were created prior to the pandemic and therefore do not reflect COVID-19 changes implemented by the House and Senate*



COVID TESTING AND VACCINATIONS

Get up to date information and resources about free community testing throughout Missouri and the latest info about vaccines:

COVID-19 Free Testing—<https://mako.exchange/splash/MOmakotesting>

COVID-19 Vaccine Information—<https://covidvaccine.mo.gov/>

TIPS FOR ACCESSIBLE VIRTUAL EVENTS

by Claudia Browner

Accessibility should be a consideration any time we communicate information digitally, whether it is on websites, social media, documents such as PDFs and PowerPoint presentations, or in virtual meetings and events. Here are some important questions to consider:

- Does your meeting/event platform offer accessibility features?
- Prior to the event/meeting, do you ask what accommodations participants might need so you can prepare accordingly?
- Is the content accessible to all, or shared prior to the event?
- Is text captioning or sign language interpretation available?
- Is there good lighting when using a video camera?
- Do speakers/presenters identify themselves before speaking, and speak one at a time?
- Are participants muted when they are not presenting/speaking?
- Is there a chat or Q&A feature for participants as an alternative for speaking?
- Are you offering a recording of the event so participants can review information they may have missed?

For more information on hosting accessible meetings and events, please visit these helpful resource links:

⇒ Making Virtual Meetings Accessible to All

<https://www.idealists.org/en/careers/accessibility-virtual-meetings>

⇒ Hosting Accessible Online Meetings

<https://www.washington.edu/accessibility/online-meetings/>