Governor's Council on Disability
Quarterly Council Meeting Minutes
August 21, 2026

Council Members Present/Participating:
Steve Ahrens, Wayne Crawford, Betty Davidson, Aaron Durso, Stacey Elster, Ron Hack (Chair), Katie Jones, Jennifer Meyer, Susan Orton, Lesia Shelton

Council Members Absent/Not Participating:
Chuck Comstock, Elijah Mayfield, Andrew Sartorius, Jason Schott, Bob Wallace

Staff:
Claudia Browner, Reece Ellis, Laura Mueth, Jenn Pettit

Department Liaisons Present/Participating:
Aly Bacon – Attorney General's Office (AGO)
Kim Buckman – Department of Mental Health (DMH/DD)
Courtney Bullard – Missouri Housing Development Commission (MHDC)
Gregery Caine – Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE/MSSD)
Justin Carver – Office of State Court Administrator (OSCA)
Sara Cleaveland – Vocational Rehabilitation (DESE/VR)
Becky Davis – Missouri Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH)
Melissa Davison – Department of Conservation (MDC)
Raylene Douglas – Department of Corrections (DOC)
Rylee Gobble – Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
Andria Hendricks – Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT)
Chad Hinkle – Department of Mental Health/Behavioral Health (DMH/BH)
Joshua Shewmaker – Department of Revenue (DOR)
Kicia Vanzandt – Department of Social Services/Family Support Division (DSS/FSD)
Robert Vaughn – Department of Higher Education & Workforce Development (DHEWD)
Venice Wood – Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS)

Call to Order/Introductions:
Council Chair Ron Hack called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM. Roll call was taken. There was a quorum for the meeting with 10 Council members in attendance. The meeting was held in person and by WebEx. Introductions followed.

Approval of Agenda: August 21, 2026, agenda was unanimously approved following a motion by Betty Davidson and a second by Wayne Crawford.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: The minutes of May 1, 2026, meeting were unanimously approved without changes following a motion by Wayne Crawford and a second by Stacey Elster.

Public Comment:
The Chair invited statements from the public; however, no members of the public requested to address the Council.

Report from Council Chair – Ron Hack:
Reported on the successful Sunset Hills 250th-anniversary celebration with 175–200 attendees, highlighting fully integrated attendance for individuals with disabilities. He also submitted a state senator's name to invite to the February 2027 council meeting while the legislature is in session.

Report from GCD Team:
Claudia Browner

- **Self-Disclosure Survey:** Promoting the October State Employee Self-Disclosure Survey to gather disability data and workplace barrier insights for the annual report, following August coordination with DOP and OEO.
- **Conferences & Tours:** Participated in a busy summer of outreach, including presenting at the AccessAbility Business Summit, touring Fulton State Hospital, speaking to OA interns, and attending the APSE-MO Employment Summit.
- **Wayfinding Project:** Promoting implementation of wayfinding technology in the capitol building.
- **Collaboration:** Collaborated with regional partner agencies to support AT and TBI grant submissions through official letters of endorsement.
- **Budget Update:** Closed FY26 with 87% E&E spending and nearly 100% personnel spending, FY27 started July 1 at the same funding level as FY26. Submitted the budget request for FY28.

Laura Mueth

- **Disability Policy Planning:** Attended meetings for various disability coalitions and advisory groups and participating in planning a statewide disability policy summit for mid-December.
- **Legislative Priorities Poll:** Completed post-session follow-ups, launched the annual Legislative Priorities Poll (running August 24 to November 2).
- **Web Accessibility:** Collaborated with IT to enhance GCD website and disability portal accessibility.
- **Service Animals Allowed Brochure Updates:** Updated the "Service Animals Allowed" brochure with Claudia to reflect DOJ guidelines clarifying that emotional support animals lack the public access protections of trained ADA service animals.

Reece Ellis

- **Missouri Youth Leadership Forum (MO-YLF) Summary:** Presented a comprehensive update on the 2026 MO-YLF, held from July 13–18. The forum welcomed 28 graduating delegates representing diverse geographic regions across Missouri.
- **Survey Data Highlights:** Shared outstanding survey results, with 100%, would recommend the program (83% rated it "great"), with 100% reporting increased leadership skills, 85% feeling more optimistic, and ADA understanding jumping from 32% to 68%.
- **Keynote Speaker & Awards (Justice Bowman & Caitlin Bartley Awards):** Daniel Van Sant, the Disability Policy Director at the Harkin Institute at Drake University in Des Moines, served as the keynote speaker, delivering an engaging message on life advocacy. Two inaugural awards were established and presented at graduation:

    1. *The Justice Bowman Breakthrough Leadership Award:* Named in memory of a beloved former delegate who passed away in December. Presented to **Liza Alumbaugh** of Thayer, who demonstrated the greatest personal and social growth.

2. *The Caitlin Bartley Advocacy Award:* Named after a distinguished YLF alumnus and advocate. Presented to **Brenna Holz** of Wentzville, who excelled in self-advocacy and supporting others.

- **Resource Fair & Community Service Project:** Delegates filled two vans with supplies for the Ronald McDonald House and participated in a post-high school transition resource fair.

Jenn Pettit

- **Inclusion & Youth Leadership Awards:** Managed logistics for the GCD Inclusion and Youth Leadership Awards and assisted Reece with the awards presentation at the MRA Conference.
- **Community Engagement:** Assisted with the OEO Nacho Fundraiser, volunteered at the Missouri State Job Olympics, and coordinated outreach for the NDEAM poster contest.
- **Administrative & Support Duties:** Handled daily office operations, including phones, emails, meetings, invoices, and OA Support Squad meetings.

State Liaison Reports:

- **Kim Buckman (DMH/DD):** Updating strategic placements, partnering on a workforce development health science grant, developing value-based payment models, and redesigning the grievance process for a mid-to-late October launch to meet federal Access Rule requirements.
- **Sara Cleaveland (DESE/VR):** Noted that the VR order of selection remains active with Category 3 releases underway, reported on summer work experiences for over 800 students, and expanded the "Customized Employment" service to the Central Region.
- **Becky Davis (MCDHH):** Highlighted the passage of HB 1840 (updating DeafBlind statutory language and establishing the communication access services program) and shared high attendance successes from the 2nd annual Deaf Family Camp and Deaf Education Symposium.
- **Chad Hinkle (DMH/BH):** Collaborating with state agencies including recent work with DSS to finalize an Employment First Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) aimed at expanding competitive, integrated employment and eliminating systemic barriers.
- **Joshua Shewmaker (DOR):** Highlighted the passage of HB 1827 (effective August 28, 2026), which extends disabled placard validity from four to eight years and authorizes licensed occupational therapists to sign physician statements.
- **Kicia Vanzandt (DSS/FSD):** Reported that FSD is upgrading customer and caseworker portals to a modern platform with real-time tools and authorized representative access, slated for a winter rollout.
- **Venice Wood (DHSS):** Reported on upcoming "No Wrong Door" person-centered training sessions across the state, a temporary 6-month moratorium on new Consumer Directed Services (CDS) enrollments to combat fraud, a soft launch for a standardized grievance process, executed Show Me Home contract awards, and noted program name changes for two Special Health Care Needs programs (Medically Complex Children & Youth Program – MCCY and Medically Complex Adult Waiver Program – MCAW).

Presentation:

Inclusive Practices, State Metrics, Post-Secondary Outcomes for Students with Disabilities – Mark Wheatley, Ed.D., Assistant Commissioner, DESE Office of Special Education

The presentation provided an overview of the Office of Special Education's strategic priorities and leadership structure. Missouri maintains a strong track record of federal IDEA compliance despite ranking 47th nationally in general education inclusion and facing ongoing teacher shortages.

Placement data for 2024 showed 2.8% of students with disabilities in separate schools (state, public, and private), increasing to 3.52% when adding homebound, hospital, and residential placements. Key discussion points focused on actionable strategies to expand inclusive practices, post-secondary outcomes, easing administrative paperwork, enhancing district collaboration, and amplifying student voice.

Unfinished Business:

- **Board Vacancies:** The Council currently has six vacancies. Claudia Browner has reached out to the Governor's Boards and Commissions office but has not yet received a response. Chair Hack urged council members and liaisons to identify qualified candidates who represent the demographic and geographic diversity of Missouri and encourage them to apply directly through the governor's online portal.

New Business:

- **ToRCH Presentation:** The Council approved a presentation for the November meeting to discuss the Transformation of Rural Health Care program, integrating clinical and social services, and addressing rural hospital bed closures.
- **Committee Reorganization & 2027 Schedule:** The November meeting will establish the 2027 meeting dates and hold the annual reorganization of committee chairs. Members and liaisons were asked to report their committee preferences to Claudia Browner.

Committee Reports: None

Member Reports:

- **Stacey Elster:** Reported that the St. Louis County Productive Living Board (PLB) is facing severe agency staffing and transportation shortages while contingency planning for potential tax revenue decreases.
- **Lesia Shelton:** Noted rural school resource shortages for students with hearing loss, praised Becky Davis for bringing the Deaf Education Symposium to Springfield, and shared that MCDHH's specialized program added a third specialist to improve local coverage in Southwest Missouri.

Adjournment:
The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 PM.

Next Meeting:
Friday, November 20, 2026, at 10:00 AM at the Missouri Behavioral Health Council, 3450 West Edgewood Drive, Jefferson City, MO 65109 or via WebEx.

Minutes by Jenn Pettit
August 31, 2026

Approved by Council
November 20, 2026