



# GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITY

## GCD Newsletter

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[Governor's Council on Disability](#)

### Inside this Issue

#### Page 1:

- [GCD hosts 20th annual Missouri Youth Leadership Forum](#)

#### Page 2:

- [2024 Legislative Priorities Poll coming soon](#)

#### Page 3:

- [Raising Awareness about Employment Inclusion](#)
- [Meet Council member Jason Schott](#)

#### Page 4:

- [Meet Council member Steve Ahrens](#)
- [News and Updates for the Disability Community](#)

#### Page 5:

- [2025 Disability Rights Legislative Day—Save the Date](#)
- [Upcoming Events](#)

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## GCD HOSTS 20TH ANNUAL MISSOURI YOUTH LEADERSHIP FORUM

by Reece Ellis

I have the distinct privilege of serving as Program Coordinator for the Missouri Youth Leadership Forum (MO-YLF) which this year was held July 16-20, 2024, at the University of Missouri in Columbia. This transformative event brought together 24 high school students with disabilities from 17 counties across Missouri. These young leaders, referred to as delegates, engaged in an intensive week of learning and growth, exploring topics such as leadership, career development, disability history and advocacy, self-determination, mentorship, and independent living.

Celebrating its 20th year, the MO-YLF is an annual event hosted by the Governor's Council on Disability (GCD) in collaboration with Vocational Rehabilitation, MU Pre-Employment Transition Services, Missouri Centers for Independent Living, and Paraquad. Since its inception in 2001, the program has empowered 414 delegates to become active and engaged leaders within their communities.



The success of MO-YLF relies heavily on the dedication and support of volunteers. This year, our team included members from GCD, the Office of Equal Opportunity, various disability organizations, and 15 MO-YLF alumni who generously donated their time and expertise. This year, an alumna delivered the opening keynote speech – Colleen Young, a paralympic swimmer who first participated in MO-YLF in 2014 and has competed in the London, Tokyo, and Rio Paralympics. She is set to compete in the upcoming Paris Paralympics. Her journey and achievements set a powerful tone for the week.



Throughout the program, delegates not only set professional and personal goals but also engaged with mentors from the disability community, learned about employment and career development, took part in a mock legislative debate, and contributed to a community service project.

*(Continued on page 2)*

## GCD HOSTS ANNUAL MISSOURI YOUTH LEADERSHIP FORUM

(Continued from page 1)

Evening activities provided opportunities for fun and bonding, including an adaptive sports night, a talent show, and a dance. The week concluded with a resource fair and graduation ceremony, where delegates and alumni shared their experiences and insights, celebrating their growth and achievements.

One of the most rewarding aspects of MO-YLF is that upon completion of the program, participants often apply to return as team leaders and facilitators in subsequent years. This continuity not only enhances their leadership skills but also strengthens the MO-YLF community, creating a supportive network for new participants.

For more details about the MO-YLF, visit [disability.mo.gov/gcd/ylf](https://disability.mo.gov/gcd/ylf) and follow the MO-YLF Facebook page [@MOLeadershipForum](https://www.facebook.com/MOLeadershipForum) for updates on upcoming events.



## LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES POLL COMING SOON

by Laura Mueth

The 2024 [Legislative Priorities Poll](#) will be available for completion beginning on August 26 and closing on November 1 at 5:00 p.m. Each year the Governor's Council on Disability distributes a Legislative Priorities Poll to get a better understanding of issues important to Missourians with disabilities and those who work and live with them. The Poll results are compiled into a report and shared with the legislators and elected officials prior to the 2025 legislative session.

For those who have completed it in previous years, this version will be shorter and have a different look. Even with the changes, it continues to be an opportunity for you to share with us, as well as state legislators and elected officials, issues you have with education, housing, transportation, employment, and health care for people with disabilities along with changes you would like to see.

Keep your eye out for the Qualtrics link to participate. It will be distributed via email and posted on GCD's [Facebook](#) page and [Poll](#) web page. Other versions which can be completed and returned to our office will also be available through those avenues. Our staff will be available to assist anyone who has difficulty understanding the questions or completing it independently.

If you have not received the Poll in the past and would like to receive it directly once it is ready, contact Laura Mueth at [Laura.Mueth@oa.mo.gov](mailto:Laura.Mueth@oa.mo.gov).

Because we want to hear from a wide variety of individuals, we encourage sharing the Poll with anyone connected to disability issues. This includes people with disabilities, families, employers, friends, employees, medical professionals, caregivers, agency staff, community members, educators, organizations, etc. The GCD looks forward to seeing the responses.



## RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT EMPLOYMENT INCLUSION

by Claudia Browner



**GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITY**  
**POSTER CONTEST**  
 for National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)

Disability Employment  
 Designing the Perfect Fit

Open Now - Deadline: September 15th!  
 Don't miss the opportunity to submit your artwork. The winning artwork will be showcased on the Governor's Council on Disability's 2024 NDEAM Poster.  
**Theme: Access to Good Jobs for All.**

[disability.mo.gov/gcd/PosterContest](https://disability.mo.gov/gcd/PosterContest)

The Governor's Council on Disability (GCD) promotes and raises awareness about the importance of employment inclusion for individuals with disabilities.

Each year, the GCD hosts a poster contest to create an awareness poster for the month of October, which is celebrated nationwide as National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). The theme for the 2024 NDEAM is **Access to Good Jobs for All**.

The poster contest is intended to spark conversations about the important contributions of individuals with disabilities in the workforce and provide Missouri artists an opportunity to have their artwork featured in the awareness poster. The artwork shall incorporate the NDEAM theme or relate to employment, inclusion or community.

**Don't miss your opportunity to participate—submit your artwork now. Artwork entries must be received by September 15!**

Learn more about the poster contest and download the entry form at [disability.mo.gov/gcd/PosterContest](https://disability.mo.gov/gcd/PosterContest).

## MEET COUNCIL MEMBER JASON SCHOTT

by Claudia Browner



On June 5, 2024, Governor Parson appointed Jason Schott of Ste. Genevieve as a Council member to the Governor's Council on Disability. Jason was born and raised in Ste. Genevieve County and currently lives in the Zell area. He has been married to his wife Sarah for 23 years and they have a son, Braden, who is 20 and lives with autism, who keeps him grounded. Jason graduated from Jefferson College with an Associates Degree in Criminal Justice and Lindenwood University with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Criminal Justice.

Jason has been in a law enforcement career for 28 years working for several agencies. He has held many different positions in his career including patrolman, K9 Officer, detective and road patrol commander. Jason currently serves as the Chief Deputy at the Ste. Genevieve County Sheriff's Office at the rank of Major, where he oversees the daily operations of the Sheriff's Office's Detention Center and Road Division. In 2016, Jason was selected and graduated from the FBI National Academy for law enforcement executives. He currently serves as the President of the Eastern Missouri Chapter of the FBI National Academy Associates.

Outside his career, Jason is very active in his community. He served on the Board of Directors for the Ste. Genevieve County Community Center, the Ste. Genevieve County Community Center Foundation and several TIF Districts. Jason has also served as the President of the Ste. Genevieve Chamber of Commerce and is the President of the Chamber Foundation and President of the Ste. Genevieve County 911 Tax Board.

His greatest enjoyment comes from being on the Ste. Genevieve County SB-40 Board, where he has served as a board member for 18 years and as the President of the Board for 15 years. Some of the SB-40 Board's greatest accomplishments are opening a provider agency, constructing an all-inclusive ball field and opening a Common Grounds Coffee Shop that employs individuals with disabilities.

## MEET COUNCIL MEMBER STEVE AHRENS

by Claudia Browner



On June 5, 2024, Governor Parson appointed Steve Ahrens of Jefferson City as a Council member to the Governor's Council on Disability. Steve currently serves as Chief Strategy Officer for Missouri Propane Gas Association, after having led the statewide trade association as its President and CEO for more than 24 years.

Previously, Steve served in state government as a designated principal assistant for the Missouri Office of Administration and as director of the Publications Division for the Missouri Secretary of State's Office. Mr. Ahrens holds a Bachelor of Science degree from (Southwest) Missouri State University.

Steve and his wife, Carla, have lived in Jefferson City since 1985. They have four children and six grandchildren.

## NEWS AND UPDATES FOR THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY

by Claudia Browner

### Caravan for Disability Freedom and Justice 2024 coming to Missouri

The Caravan for Disability Freedom and Justice has been traveling across the county and will be making stops in St. Louis on August 8 and Columbia on August 12. Visit <https://thedisabilitycaravan.com/> for more information.

### Enforcing the Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) includes five different sections, known as titles, that outline the rights of people with disabilities and responsibilities of governments, businesses, and organizations covered by the legislation. A new [Fact Sheet](#) provided by the ADA National Network summarizes which federal agencies enforce the different titles of the ADA. Visit <adata.org/enforcing-the-ADA> for more information.

### Helping Workers with Disabilities get ahead through Good Jobs: A Toolkit of Practical Strategies

The US Department of Labor's Office of Disability Policy (ODEP) has developed a comprehensive new resource toolkit to help employers in high demand industries recruit, hire, retain and advance workers with disabilities. Find out more at [dol.gov/agencies/odep/initiatives/good\\_jobs/toolkit](dol.gov/agencies/odep/initiatives/good_jobs/toolkit)

### Justice Department to publish Final Rule to improve Access to Medical Care for People with Disabilities

On the 34th anniversary of the ADA on July 26, 2024, US Attorney General Merrick B. Garland signed a final rule under Title II of the ADA to improve access to medical diagnostic equipment for people with disabilities, including equipment such as medical examination tables, scales, dental chairs, x-ray and mammography machines. Making this equipment accessible assures people with disabilities have equal access to medical care.

The rule will soon be available for review on the Federal Register's website at <www.federalregister.gov> and a Fact Sheet providing information about the final rule will be available on the <ada.gov> website.

### Missouri Governor's Council on Disability— Council Members

- Ronald Hack, Council Chair, St. Louis
- Steve Ahrens, Jefferson City
- Charles Comstock, Kirksville
- Stacey Elster, Wildwood
- Wayne Crawford, Marshall
- Betty Davidson, Ph.D., St. Louis
- Chip Hailey, Joplin
- Rosemary Hendon, West Plains
- Katie Jones, St. Charles
- Kim Lackey, St. Louis
- Elijah Mayfield, Jefferson City
- Susan Orton, Creve Coeur
- Andrew Sartorius, Jefferson City
- Jason Schott, Ste. Genevieve
- Lesia Shelton, Buffalo
- Robert Wallace, St. Louis

### Missouri Governor's Council on Disability— Staff Members

- Claudia Browner, Executive Director
- Reece Ellis, Senior Program Specialist
- Laura Mueth, Senior Program Specialist
- Jennifer Pettit, Administrative Support Professional

## 2025 DISABILITY RIGHTS LEGISLATIVE DAY— SAVE THE DATE

by Claudia Browner



Each Spring, disability advocates from all areas of the state travel to the Missouri State Capitol in Jefferson City to rally for disability rights.

The date for the 2024 Disability Rights Legislative Day (DRLD) has been set for Wednesday, March 5, 2025. Mark your calendars now so you can attend and be part of this important advocacy day with state legislators.

Visit the DRLD website at [drlld.org](http://drlld.org) to keep up to date on information about the event.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

Check out these upcoming disability-related conferences and events! Click on the links to learn more or register.

- **August 14, 2024**  
[Senior Day at the Missouri State Fair, Sedalia](#)
- **August 25—27, 2024**  
[Real Voices - Real Choices Conference, Margaritaville Lake Resort](#)
- **September 3—5, 2024**  
[2024 Missouri Transit Conference & Expo](#)
- **September 9—11, 2024**  
[Ma4 Show Me Summit on Aging & Health 2024, Springfield](#)
- **September 25, 2024**  
[Missouri Mobility Management 2024 Virtual Summit](#)
- **September 26—27, 2024**  
[Center for Disability Inclusion 2024 Inclusion Summit, Kansas City/virtual](#)
- **October 9—11, 2024**  
[MACDDS Annual Conference, Columbia](#)

*If you know of other events you would like us to share with the disability community, please contact our office.*