



GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITY

GCD NEWSLETTER

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[Governor's Council on Disability](#)

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RECOGNIZING LEADERS IN INCLUSION AND YOUTH LEADERSHIP

by Claudia Browner

THE GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITY IS ACCEPTING NOMINATIONS NOW FOR THE 2024 ANNUAL INCLUSION AND YOUTH LEADERSHIP AWARDS

As the year 2024 is coming to a close, the Governor's Council on Disability (GCD) is looking to honor and recognize this year's leaders in inclusion and youth leadership.

The [Inclusion Award](#) (33rd year) is presented annually to recognize private and public employers, individuals, businesses or organizations that have worked toward greater disability inclusion by taking exceptional, proactive, and innovative measures to integrate and mainstream people with disabilities into their programs, activities, and operations.

The nomination form and criteria for the Inclusion Award are available [here](#).

The [Youth Leadership Award](#) (12th year) recognizes an outstanding Missouri youth (age 16-26) with a disability that has demonstrated exemplary leadership by engaging in activities that improve the quality of life of people with disabilities in their communities in Missouri. The nomination form and criteria for the Youth Leadership Award are available [here](#).

Nominate now—the nomination deadline is January 31!

Nominations now open for the Governor's Council on Disability's

2024 Inclusion Awards

Nominations due **January 31, 2025**

Recognizing leaders in Inclusion



disability.mo.gov/gcd/inclusionawards (573) 751-2600

Nominations now open for the Governor's Council on Disability's

2024 Youth Leadership Awards

Nominations due **January 31, 2025**

Recognizing leaders in Youth Leadership



disability.mo.gov/gcd/youthleadershipawards (573) 751-2600

2024 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES POLL RESULTS

by Laura Mueth



The 2024 Legislative Priorities Poll ended the first day of November. Four hundred ninety-seven people representing 71 of Missouri's counties completed it. The 2025 legislative priorities for the Governor's Council on Disability will be:

- The State of Missouri updating websites to include more language that is direct and easy to understand for those with reading or writing difficulties
- The Personal Care Attendant/Aide/Direct Support Professional workforce providing critical services
- Transportation needs
- Care workforce needs

The first two priorities were determined by combining the two highest "strongly agree" and "agree" response percentages. The remaining two are need areas expressed throughout all the open response questions.

An interactive dashboard and a written report showing the results for all the questions will be posted soon on the [Annual Legislative Priorities Poll page](#). These materials and all open answer responses will be shared with representatives, senators, and elected officials when the legislative session begins in January.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to contribute this year.

REGISTRATION OPEN NOW FOR 2025 LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION PROJECT WEBINARS

by Laura Mueth

The Governor's Council on Disability sponsors the Legislative Education Project (LEP) during the legislative session to provide an opportunity for individuals or organizations to learn about the legislative process in Missouri and learn additional information regarding disability policies or proposed legislation that impact people with disabilities.

The purpose of the LEP is to educate and motivate individuals by providing opportunities to become more active in creating positive public policies for people with disabilities.

Legislative Education Project (LEP) webinars will be offered four times in 2025 at no cost to participants. The format and content will be the same each time. The topics covered will be the legislative process, communicating with legislators, and current state bills related to disability. Webex software will be used to conduct each webinar.



Registration is required. Please complete the [LEP webinars registration form](#) to register for one of the following dates:

- January 2, 2025, 9:00-10:30 AM
- January 30, 2025, 9:00-10:30 AM
- February 27, 2025, 7:00-8:30 PM
- March 13, 2025, 1:00-2:30 PM

Scan QR code to register



Additional information about the LEP can be found on the [LEP web page](#).

CELEBRATING INCLUSION: MISSOURI'S INAUGURAL NDEAM EVENT

by Reece Ellis

On October 21, the Missouri Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) and Governor's Council on Disability (GCD) hosted the state's first National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) Celebration at the Harry S Truman Building in Jefferson City. This landmark event emphasized the value of inclusive hiring practices and celebrated the contributions of individuals with disabilities in the workforce.

Claudia Browner, Executive Director of the Governor's Council on Disability (GCD) and Acting Director of the Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO), opened the ceremony by presenting the governor's proclamation in recognition of NDEAM. Disability advocate and MO-YLF alum Kayla Patek followed with a stirring vocal performance of the national anthem, setting the tone for a day focused on awareness and empowerment.

The program included recognition of JP Sauter, a high school student from St. Joseph and winner of the 2024 NDEAM Poster Contest. JP's poster, which highlights the importance of inclusive workplaces, will be displayed across state agencies, and featured on the GCD website.



NDEAM planning committee members with Lydia Olmsted and Kayla Patek

Speakers shared their personal journeys and demonstrated the power of meaningful employment for people with disabilities:

- Shirlene Treadwell, a longtime Special Olympics athlete, shared how her involvement in athletics prepared her for success in manufacturing and customer service.
- Brittani Dagen, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Certified Reciprocal Alcohol and Drug Counselor, delivered a heartfelt message about overcoming depression and addiction. Brittani highlighted the transformative role of Vocational Rehabilitation, noting, "Good jobs change lives."
- Lydia Olmstead, keynote speaker and disability employment advocate, shared her journey advocating for reasonable accommodations, particularly for those in the Deafblind community, and stressed the invaluable contributions individuals with disabilities bring to workplaces. Lydia is a MO-YLF alum and winner of the 2023 Youth Leadership Award.



Shirlene Treadwell



JP Sauter



Brittani Degan

Additional photos and the video of the NDEAM event are available [here](#)

In addition to the presentations, the event featured an exhibit area with organizations offering resources for employers seeking to enhance disability inclusion. Including Special Olympics Missouri, Missouri Assistive Technology, The Office of Administration, The Independent Living Resource Center, Missouri Centers for Independent Living, The Department of Mental Health, Vocational Rehabilitation, Missouri Mental Health Foundation, Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council, MoABLE, Rehabilitation Services for The Blind, and NaviLens.

The GCD looks forward to supporting and expanding these efforts to promote disability inclusion across the state. Thank you to all who made this event possible and to those who continue to champion disability awareness and employment inclusion.

APPLY NOW! APPLICATIONS OPEN FOR 21ST MISSOURI YOUTH LEADERSHIP FORUM

by Reece Ellis

The Governor's Council on Disability is excited to announce that applications are now open for the 2025 [Missouri Youth Leadership Forum \(MO-YLF\)](#)!

This unique, weeklong leadership experience will take place July 15–19, 2025, on the University of Missouri campus in Columbia. MO-YLF is designed to empower high school students with disabilities (ages 16–21) to become confident leaders and advocates in their communities.



Each year, approximately 30 delegates from across Missouri come together to:

- Build Leadership Skills through workshops on self-advocacy, goal-setting, and self-determination.
- Explore Disability Rights and Culture with peers and mentors who share lived experiences.
- Experience Civic Engagement by participating in a mock legislative session and visiting the state Capitol.
- Connect with Community through social activities like a talent show, adaptive sports, and more.

MO-YLF provides a life-changing opportunity for young people to prepare for success in education, employment, and independent living—all in a supportive, inclusive environment. Thanks to our generous sponsors, the program is offered at no cost to delegates.

Applications are due by March 31, 2025. For more details or to apply, visit www.disability.mo.gov/gcd/ylf. If you have any questions about the GCD’s youth programs, please contact Reece Ellis at reece.ellis@oa.mo.gov or 573-751-2600.

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

EXPERIENCE MO-YLF THROUGH OUR NEW VIDEO

We’re excited to share a brand-new promotional video for the Missouri Youth Leadership Forum (MO-YLF)! Created by the Office of Administration’s communications team using footage from this past year’s Forum, the video highlights the impact of the program through the voices and experiences of some of those who make it meaningful.

The video features interviews with parents of delegates who share the transformative impact MO-YLF has had on their children, as well as insights from a couple of our dedicated staff members, Tatem Petet and Letiah Fraser. Their perspectives shine a light on the program’s mission to empower young leaders and build a stronger disability community.

Whether you’re a parent, teacher, or student considering applying, this video provides an authentic and heartfelt glimpse into the Forum. We encourage you to watch the video and share it widely to help more students and families learn about this incredible opportunity.

Watch the video here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eKzvi_BKBPO



REGISTER FOR AN INFORMATIONAL WEBINAR ABOUT MO-YLF

	December 16, 2024	5:30 - 6:30 PM
	January 15, 2025	2:00 - 3:00 PM
	February 6, 2025	5:00 - 6:00 PM
	March 11, 2025	2:30 - 3:30 PM
Register at https://tinyurl.com/moylf-webinars		

The Governor's Council on Disability is offering **free informational webinars** for the Missouri Youth Leadership Forum (MO-YLF). Each webinar will include information on what takes place during MO-YLF, what the benefits are for a student to attend, and information on the application process.

All prospective delegates, educators, service providers, and families are welcome to register and attend! Registration is required to attend.

Please register at <https://tinyurl.com/moylf-webinars>

NATIONAL COUNCIL ON DISABILITY RELEASES ANNUAL REPORT

by Claudia Browner



The National Council on Disability (NCD) published its annual report on October 31, reviewing governmentwide disability policy developments. The report highlights issues relating to the health status and healthcare of people with disabilities, employment, travel, transportation, accessible technology, housing and the US census. The NCD report provides information on progress made in achieving disability policies and identifies new and emerging issues to be addressed.

The full report is available for download at

<https://www.ncd.gov/report/national-disability-policy-a-progress-report-2024/>

VETERANS DAY CELEBRATION

by Kim Hicks, Office of Equal Opportunity

The Governor's Council on Disability recently joined the Office of Equal Opportunity in hosting a statewide gathering to pay tribute to the courageous men and women who have served in the armed forces. This annual statewide Veterans Day Celebration serves as a heartfelt reminder of their sacrifices and dedication as we reflect on their unwavering commitment to protecting our freedoms.

This year's celebration began with the Smith-Cotton JROTC Posting of the Colors, followed by the National Anthem sung by Caroline Coulter, Deputy Commissioner and General Counsel for the Office of Administration. A series of speeches followed, offering heartfelt tributes to those who have served. Among the speakers were Missouri Lieutenant Governor Mike Kehoe, Executive Director Paul Kirchhoff of the Missouri Veterans Commission, State Representative Dave Griffith, and Missouri Department of Revenue Director Wayne Wallingford, who delivered the keynote message. Throughout the day, attendees had the opportunity to engage with various veterans' organizations and learn about the resources and supports available to those who have served.

The 135th Army Marching Band brought the annual ceremony to a close with a series of stirring renditions of beloved patriotic songs. Their performance resonated throughout the building, creating an atmosphere filled with reverence and gratitude. Reflecting on this year's celebration, we are reminded of veterans' profound impact on our state and society.

Our annual Veterans Day event is more than just a day of recognition; it is a reaffirmation of our commitment to honoring and supporting those who have served. We look forward to continuing this tradition, ensuring that the sacrifices of our veterans are never forgotten.



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

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION ANNOUNCES CHANGES TO IN-PERSON SERVICES

by Claudia Browner

The [Social Security Administration](#) (SSA) recently announced moving to appointment-based services at their local Social Security offices in an effort to reduce wait times and streamline service delivery.

Effective January 6, 2025, the SSA will require customers to schedule an appointment for services in its local offices, including requests for Social Security cards. The SSA encourages customers to familiarize themselves with:

[Online services](#) for transactions that can be completed conveniently and securely, and [Automated services](#) available through calling the national toll-free number 1-800-772-1213

Customers who are not able to conduct their business online or with the automated phone options may call their local Social Security office or toll-free number to schedule an appointment. The SSA emphasized that vulnerable populations or individuals requiring immediate or specialized attention may still walk in for services.

UPCOMING EVENTS

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

February 3—5, 2025

[Virtual Winter ADA Conference](#)

February 23, 2025

[Disability Awareness Convention](#), hosted by The Arya Foundation, Chesterfield

February 26, 2025

[Disability Rights Legislative Day](#), Jefferson City

May 5—7, 2025

[Virtual ADA Symposium](#)

May 28—30, 2025

[Missouri Rehabilitation Association \(MRA\) Conference](#), Lake of the Ozarks

June 15—18, 2025

[National ADA Symposium](#), Atlanta, Georgia

July 15-19, 2025

[Missouri Youth Leadership Forum](#), Columbia

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

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