



GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL
ON DISABILITY

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GCD NEWSLETTER

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[Governor's Council on Disability](#)

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HONORING CHANGEMAKERS—NOMINATIONS NOW OPEN FOR ANNUAL GCD AWARDS

by Claudia Browner

Each year, the Governor's Council on Disability's annual Inclusion and Youth Leadership Awards honor the remarkable individuals and organizations driving progress in disability inclusion and youth leadership. These prestigious awards celebrate Missourians who break barriers, create opportunities, and inspire positive change in their communities—and we need your help to identify them.

Do you know a young leader in the disability community who is using their voice to make a difference? An educator, professional, advocate or organization advancing equal opportunities and accessibility for people with disabilities? **Now is the time to nominate them.**

This is your opportunity to shine a spotlight on leaders who champion accessibility, mentor young people, foster inclusive environments, or spark transformative initiatives. Their impact matters, and their stories deserve to be told.

Share the achievements, contributions, and actions of someone who has made a meaningful difference in the lives of people with disabilities. By uplifting exceptional leaders, we amplify their work and empower others to strengthen our movement toward equal opportunities and full participation for people with disabilities.

The **Inclusion Award** (34th year) criteria and nomination form are available on the [Inclusion Awards](#) web page.

The **Youth Leadership Award** (13th year) criteria and nomination form are available on the [Youth Leadership Awards](#) web page.

Don't wait—the nomination deadline is January 31!

Submit your nominations now to recognize those whose work deserves to be celebrated!

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

2025 Inclusion Awards

Nominations due **January 31, 2026**

Recognizing leaders in Inclusion



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

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

2025 Youth Leadership Awards

Nominations due **January 31, 2026**

Recognizing leaders in Youth Leadership



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

WHAT'S AHEAD: KEY LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITIES 2025—2026 by Laura Mueth

As 2025 concludes and we look ahead to 2026, the Governor's Council on Disability continues three important legislative activities: the Legislative Priorities Poll was completed and results were finalized, the Legislative Education Project (LEP) webinars are open for registration, and the GCD is collaborating with partnering agencies in the planning of Disability Rights Legislative Day (DRLD).

2025 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES POLL RESULTS

The Legislative Priorities Poll ended November 3. Three hundred forty-six people answered the questions. Based on the results, the 2026 legislative priorities for the GCD 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 workforce providing critical services
- Funding needs
- Transportation 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.

Again this year, 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](#). Last year's dashboard as well as reports from previous years are also available on the web page.

This information will also be shared with representatives, senators, and additional elected officials later this month prior to the beginning of the legislative session. Thank you to everyone who participated this year.

2026 LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION PROJECT WEBINARS

Legislative Education Project webinars will be offered four times in 2026 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. The dates and times are listed below. Registration is required.

Please complete the [LEP webinars registration form](#) to register.

- January 8, 2026, 9:00-10:30 AM
- February 5, 2026, 9:00-10:30 AM
- March 5, 2025, 9:00-10:30 AM
- March 26, 2025, 1:00-2:30 PM

Scan the QR code to register





LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION PROJECT WEBINARS



<https://tinyurl.com/GCD-LEP>

Learn about the legislative process in Missouri and how to become active in creating positive public policies for people with disabilities.
<https://disability.mo.gov/gcd/LEP.htm>

This information can also be found on the [LEP web page](#).

DISABILITY RIGHTS LEGISLATIVE DAY EVENT PLANNING

Planning for the 25th Disability Rights Legislative Day on February 25, 2026 is underway. While the rally will occur from 11:00 to noon and is what many attendees look forward to, the entire day is designed for people with disabilities, their families, and others to share what is important to them with representatives and senators. Make sure your voice is heard.

Begin considering now which legislators you want to visit with while you are attending the event. Legislative offices will become more active throughout this month as pre-filing of bills occurs with the legislative session beginning in January. This could be a great time to contact those offices to share that you will be attending and would like to schedule a visit on that day. While the agenda has not been finalized, there will be time before and after the rally to meet with legislators.

If you want to be involved with the rally, applications to be a speaker will be accepted beginning later this month. The application process information will be available at [DRLD Rally Speaker](#).

If you are someone with lived experience of a disability and are interested in assisting on the day of the event, applications for the DRLD Access Team along with criteria and responsibility/role information will be available at [DRLD Access Team](#). As planning progresses and more details are solidified, the [DRLD website](#) will be updated.



STATEWIDE NDEAM CELEBRATION

by Reece Ellis

The Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) and the Governor's Council on Disability (GCD) hosted the statewide National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) celebration on Friday, October 10. The celebration presented the achievements of various professionals, emphasizing their journey to securing roles in government and business.

The celebration featured music provided by Kapital Kicks Big Band. It also provided team members with direct insights from seasoned experts. Brian Nevins, a Transportation Engineer for the Federal Highway Administration and frequent Missouri Youth Leadership Forum mentor, served as the keynote speaker. Nevins spoke about overcoming career barriers after acquiring a disability. He detailed how assistance from Vocational Rehabilitation allowed him to pursue a career in engineering. He stressed that when people with disabilities are given opportunity, workplaces become more innovative and reflective of the world.

Attendees also heard from Seyoon Choi, Sr. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for the Blind at the Department of Social Services. Choi is a recipient of the GCD's 2021 Youth Leadership Award. He gained employment with the State after attending the Office of Administration's Talent Showcase. This hiring event showcases candidate skills directly, providing a clear path to career growth within state government.

The program featured exhibitors who provide assistive resources and practical tools for job seekers and current state team members.

The GCD also recognized the winner of the annual poster contest, Evelyn Johnson, a senior at Affton High School. Her thoughtful artwork is titled "Bruised Fruit is Still Edible". This design, which promotes a welcoming work environment and celebrates the valuable contributions of workers with disabilities, was featured statewide in October. The artist reminds us that perceived imperfections do not diminish inherent value.

The GCD looks forward to supporting and expanding these efforts to promote employment advancement across the state. We thank all who supported the event and champion this important work.



APPLY NOW! APPLICATIONS OPEN FOR MISSOURI YOUTH LEADERSHIP FORUM

by Reece Ellis

The annual application season for the Missouri Youth Leadership Forum (MO-YLF) is here! The Governor's Council on Disability (GCD) announces that applications are now open for the 2026 session.

We invite high school students with disabilities, ages 16-21, to apply for this five-day, four-night leadership experience. The MO-YLF is a no-cost program designed to help young leaders cultivate leadership, citizenship, and social skills. Delegates gain skills, connect with mentors, and experience life on a college campus at the University of Missouri in Columbia.

The 2026 MO-YLF will take place from July 14-18, 2026, at the University of Missouri in Columbia. Students must submit their applications by the **March 16, 2026** deadline. The program operates at no cost to selected delegates, thanks to the support of generous sponsors and donors. All necessary accommodations and personal care needs are provided to participants.

During this week, delegates focus on engaging activities that deliver critical leadership and transition skills. Students participate in workshops that cover key areas like self-advocacy, goal setting, and self-determination. They explore the history of disability rights and culture while connecting with successful mentors.

The program focuses heavily on readiness for life after high school. Delegates receive resources to prepare for a successful transition to higher education, employment, and independent living.

Beyond the structured learning, the week promotes social development. Participants form networks with peers and young leaders from the disability community, and enjoy recreation, including adaptive sports and social events like a talent show and dance.

The GCD is hosting several free informational webinars for delegates, parents, and partners. This is the time to get questions answered directly by the MO-YLF team. The first webinar is scheduled for December 3, 2025. Additional dates are set throughout December, January, February, and March.

Students should apply early.

Learn more and start your application today at: <https://disability.mo.gov/gcd/ylf/>



MISSOURI YOUTH LEADERSHIP FORUM

July 14 - 18, 2026

University of Missouri
in Columbia, MO



The Missouri Youth Leadership Forum is designed for young adults with disabilities to learn from successful leaders and role models.

Participants gain knowledge about leadership styles, develop self-determination skills, and learn about the disability community and disability laws, and the legislative process.

The MO-YLF equips students with the tools to achieve their post-secondary goals in education, employment, and independent living; All while having fun and making lifelong friends!

Application Deadline is March 16, 2026!

[Learn more and apply at disability.mo.gov/gcd/ylf](https://disability.mo.gov/gcd/ylf)

Questions? 573-751-2600 gcd@oa.mo.gov

Are you interested in learning more about the Missouri Youth Leadership Forum?

Join us for an informational webinar

REGISTER NOW



December 3, 2025	10:30 - 11:30 AM
December 11, 2025	2:00 - 3:00 PM
January 9, 2026	1:30 - 2:30 PM
January 26, 2026	5:00 - 6:00 PM
February 10, 2026	5:30 - 6:30 PM
February 11, 2026	11:30 - 12:30 PM
March 12, 2026	4:00 - 5:00 PM

Register at
<https://tinyurl.com/2026-moylf-webinars>




MISSOURI YOUTH LEADERSHIP FORUM

More information at
disability.mo.gov/gcd/ylf

If you have any questions, please contact us at
573.751.2600 or gcd@oa.mo.gov

STATEWIDE VETERANS DAY CELEBRATION HONORS PUBLIC SERVICE

by Reece Ellis

On Thursday, November 13, 2025, the Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) hosted the annual Statewide Veterans Day Celebration in collaboration with the Governor's Council on Disability (GCD) and other state agencies. The celebration emphasized the value of veterans' experience within the state workforce. Veterans bring critical organization and discipline, which support the state's mission to serve its citizens.

The ceremony took place in the Harry S Truman Building's auditorium from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The program began with the Posting of the Colors by the Smith-Cotton JROTC. Claudia Browner, Director of the GCD and Acting Director of OEO, delivered the welcoming remarks and read the Veterans Day Proclamation issued by Governor Mike Kehoe.

The program featured remarks from three distinguished speakers:

- Missouri State Representative David Griffith, Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans
- Dr. Matthew Naylor, Director and CEO of the National WWI Museum and Memorial
- Major General Charles D. Hausman, Adjutant General of the Missouri National Guard



The program concluded with a message from Missouri State Treasurer Vivek Malek. Treasurer Malek updated attendees on the MO-ABLE program and shared information regarding unclaimed property, specifically mentioning the hundreds of service medals held by the state.

The Smith-Cotton JROTC Drill Team then returned to perform their final routine. Veteran service organizations supported the event, setting up tables to provide state team members with resources. Attendees had lunch options from two veteran-owned and operated food trucks—Hall's Kitchen and Mr. Murphy's Stuffed Potatoes.



The GCD appreciates the continuous service veterans give to Missouri. Veterans secured the nation, and they now contribute their knowledge to serving Missouri citizens. Their discipline and leadership are essential to the effective operation of government.

The Governor's Council on Disability thanks all veterans for their service to our country.



GCD MILESTONES AND MOMENTS WORTH CELEBRATING

by Claudia Browner

As we wind down another fast-moving year, it is the perfect time to pause and reflect on everything our team has accomplished together. This has been a year defined by collaboration, resilience, and meaningful milestones. Whether it was working on our programs and initiatives, streamlining internal processes, or celebrating personal and professional achievements, each success tells the story of a team committed to growth and excellence.

Just as important as the goals we reached are the team members who helped us reach them. Thank you for bringing your best—your creativity, problem-solving, kindness, and commitment to showing up for each other. Recognition isn't limited to major accomplishments, it's also found in the everyday wins, the support offered behind the scenes, and the willingness to adapt and push forward.

As we look to the coming year, we carry forward the lessons learned and the momentum built. Together, we'll set new goals, identify opportunities to innovate, and continue to strengthen the foundation we've created.

Here's to closing out the year with pride—and stepping into the next year with purpose and excitement.

In October, GCD team member Jenn Pettit was recognized with the OA CARES award for her great customer service and contributions to the team. Jenn serves as the Lead Administrative Professional for the Governor's Council on Disability and also supports the Office of Equal Opportunity team. Members of the GCD and Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) joined the award celebration recognizing Jenn's accomplishments.



Reece Ellis, Senior Program Specialist for the GCD, was recognized with the Professional Leadership Development Award for consistently being a top performer of the agency, which allows him to participate in an upcoming professional development opportunity.



Claudia Browner reached a milestone in November, when she celebrated her 20-year work anniversary with the GCD and 32 years with the State of Missouri.



Laura Mueth, Senior Program Specialist for the GCD, celebrates her 15-year work anniversary with the agency in December.



The OEO and GCD team held a very successful fundraiser to support the Missouri State Employees Charitable Campaign (MSECC). Together, the team served more than 100 nacho dinners, selling out in about 45 minutes and raising close to \$1,300 for two local charities.

OEO team member Kim Hicks leads the statewide MSECC campaign for the State of Missouri government.



To close out the year and plan ahead for 2026, GCD and OEO team members participated in a strategic planning meeting that included team building activities and a tour of the Office of Administration's Document Solutions facility.

Missouri Governor's Council on Disability—Council Members

- Ronald Hack, Council Chair, St. Louis
- Steve Ahrens, Jefferson City
- Charles Comstock, Kirksville
- Wayne Crawford, Marshall
- Betty Davidson, Ph.D., St. Louis
- Aaron Durso, Taneyville
- Stacey Elster, Wildwood
- Katie Jones, St. Charles
- Elijah Mayfield, Jefferson City
- Jennifer Meyer, O'Fallon
- 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

UPCOMING EVENTS

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

February 2—4, 2026

[Winter ADA Coordinator Conference](#), hosted by the Great Plains ADA Center (virtual)

February 22, 2026

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

February 25, 2026

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

July 14—18, 2026

[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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