

# GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITY

## GCD NEWSLETTER



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June 2026

### CELEBRATING CHAMPIONS OF INCLUSION AND YOUTH LEADERSHIP: THE 2025 GCD AWARD WINNERS

by Claudia Browner

For over three decades, the Governor's Council on Disability (GCD) has presented the **Inclusion Award** to spotlight the incredible individuals and organizations creating greater access and opportunity for Missourians with disabilities, adding the **Youth Leadership Award** to the tradition in 2013. Through innovation, advocacy, and a deep commitment to improving lives, this year's honorees embody the true spirit of community.

On May 28, the GCD officially recognized the 2025 award recipients at the annual Missouri Rehabilitation Association (MRA) conference at Lake Ozark. As a premier statewide training conference, the MRA brings together professionals dedicated to empowering individuals with disabilities, making it the perfect venue to celebrate these outstanding achievements.



#### 2025 Award Recipients

This year marked the 34th Annual Inclusion Award and the 13th Annual Youth Leadership Award. The GCD expanded its recognition this year by honoring two incredible winners for the Inclusion Award.

- **Inclusion Award Winner:** Ed Pupillo, Pupillo's Wicked Chicken and Grand Slam Restaurants, Fenton
- **Inclusion Award Winner:** Jessica Ratsch, Platte County R3 Schools, Platte City
- **Inclusion Award Honorable Mention:** Joyce Fenner, Jordan's Place, Marshfield
- **Youth Leadership Award Winner:** Luke McKeon, St. Charles
- **Youth Leadership Award Honorable Mention:** Izabella Uccello, Springfield



#### About the Awards

The Inclusion Award recognizes Missouri employers, individuals, or organizations taking proactive, innovative steps to fully integrate people with disabilities into their daily workforce and operations.

The Youth Leadership Award honors young Missourians (ages 16–26) with a disability who have demonstrated outstanding leadership and made a positive impact on their local community.

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Congratulations to all of our 2025 award winners and honorable mentions! Your dedication makes Missouri a more inclusive place for everyone.

### Nominate a Leader This Fall!

The Governor's Council on Disability accepts nominations for these annual awards programs each fall. If you know of an individual, youth leader, or organization deserving of recognition for their commitment to advancing disability inclusion, we encourage you to participate. Nomination forms will be available online by October.

To submit a nomination, or to learn more about this year's winners and nominees, visit the official [Inclusion Awards](#) and [Youth Leadership Awards](#) websites.

Article images: Photo 1 - Luke McKeon, Izabella Uccello, Reece Ellis (GCD), Jessica Ratsch, Ed Pupillo, Photo 2 - Joyce Fenner

## CALL FOR ARTISTS: PARTICIPATE IN THE GCD'S 2026 NDEAM POSTER CONTEST

by Claudia Browner

Great talent drives great workplaces and your creativity can help spotlight the power of employment inclusion across Missouri!

The Governor's Council on Disability (GCD) invites you to participate in its annual Poster Contest in honor of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). This year's theme is Celebrating Value and Talent, carrying the spirit of our last celebration forward into 2026 in honor of America's 250th birthday.

We invite you to design a poster that captures the spirit of disability inclusion in the workplace. Your artwork should highlight the talent, value, and vital contributions of workers with disabilities.

Whether you are a seasoned professional artist or a passionate newcomer, we want to see your unique perspective on workplace access and opportunity.

The winning artist will receive statewide visibility and the opportunity to make a meaningful impact:

- Your artwork will be featured on the official GCD NDEAM poster
- Your design will be showcased during NDEAM events and shared statewide to help spread awareness about the importance of inclusive employment
- The winner will be formally recognized at the NDEAM celebration event in Jefferson City this October

### How to Enter:

To share your vision and participate in this year's celebration, please follow these steps:

Step 1: Create your original artwork.

Step 2: Download the official entry form and review detailed guidelines at [disability.mo.gov/gcd/PosterContest/](https://disability.mo.gov/gcd/PosterContest/).

Step 3: Submit your artwork and entry form by the final deadline.

### Submission Deadline: August 31, 2026

This initiative is more than a contest—it is a celebration of progress, pride, and potential. Let your creativity help shape the future of inclusive, accessible employment across our state. We look forward to reviewing your submissions!

**Governor's Council on Disability**

**POSTER CONTEST**



 **SUBMIT ENTRIES BY AUGUST 31, 2026**

**CALLING ALL MISSOURI ARTISTS**

Submit your creative work for a chance to be featured on the Governor's Council on Disability's 2026 National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) poster.

This year's NDEAM theme is **Celebrating Value and Talent**, carrying the spirit of last year's celebration forward through 2026 in honor of America's 250th birthday.





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

## LEGISLATIVE SESSION RESULTS

by Laura Mueth

The 2026 legislative session ended on Friday, May 15, and Governor Kehoe has already signed three bills that the GCD has been tracking:

[House Bill 2641](#) related to medical marijuana patient information, [House Bill 2180](#) related to mail sent by state agencies, and [Senate Bill 907](#) related to website accessibility lawsuits.

Several additional bills have been Truly Agreed To and Finally Passed, signed by the Speaker of the House and Senate President Pro Tem, and sent to the Governor. A few of these bills that relate to people with disabilities are yet to be acted on by the Governor.

These include:

[House Bill 1827](#) related to occupational therapists being able to complete physician statements for disability placards and plates, [House Bill 2974](#) which includes physician assistant and dental compacts, and [House Bill 2637](#) which includes assisted outpatient treatment changes and modifying notarization requirements for mental health facility detention.

[House Joint Resolution 173](#) related to eliminating the income tax was also Truly Agreed To and Finally Passed, but does not require consideration by the Governor. It was sent to the Secretary of State and will be placed on the upcoming election ballot for consideration by voters.

You can use the [Legislative Update](#) to review the status of all disability related bills. To review all Truly Agreed To and Finally Passed bills including ones not related to disability, the [Truly Agreed To and Finally Passed](#) list can be utilized.

As we progress through the summer, Governor Kehoe will act on any remaining bills sent to him. These will include the appropriations bills which detail funding for the programs, services, and employees of state government. The appropriation bills must be acted on before the new fiscal year begins July 1. A governor has three options for bills: sign, take no action, or veto a bill. Those that are vetoed can be brought up by the General Assembly during the veto session for potential override votes. You can follow the Governor's legislative actions at [Governor Legislative Actions](#) or check out the upcoming July issue of the Legislative Update where those will be listed.

The 2026 legislative session has been busy. Those legislators who are eligible to run for another term or for another office will be holding events and visiting with voters before the upcoming elections. Those situations are perfect opportunities to share your thoughts on what was accomplished this session and to mention concerns or ideas for next session.

*Note: Clicking the link with each bill or joint resolution will take you to the web page for that bill or resolution where the bill summaries, bill texts, and amendments can be accessed. Clicking the Legislative Update link will take you to the web page where each issue of the Legislative Update for this legislative session can be found.*



## THE COUNTDOWN TO MO-YLF 2026 IS OFFICIALLY ON!

by Reece Ellis



After a long year of planning, traveling to schools, and attending events across Missouri, the countdown to the 2026 Missouri Youth Leadership Forum has officially begun!

Getting out into our communities across our state to meet face-to-face with so many wonderful students, dedicated teachers, and supportive families has been an incredible experience. It reminds our team exactly why we do this work, and it makes the arrival of summer that much more exciting.

We are absolutely thrilled to announce that 30 outstanding delegates have been accepted into this year's forum. This cohort represents the true diversity of our state, with young leaders coming together from Mound City to Thayer, from Kansas City to St. Louis, from Springfield to Louisiana, and everywhere in between. These high school students have already shown immense leadership potential, and we cannot wait to see them learn, grow, and build true disability pride together this July in Columbia.

MO-YLF of course would not be possible without its incredible volunteer staff. We have accepted 16 volunteer staff members this summer—a great mix of returning veteran alumni who bring years of experience and passionate first-timers ready to transition from being delegates and step up as team leaders. Together, they will facilitate small groups, share their own lived experiences, and mentor our delegates as they navigate the transition from high school to adult life.

MO-YLF remains a program entirely funded by the generosity of our community through sponsorships and in-kind donations. Because of this incredible support, we are proud to offer this life-changing week completely free of charge to our delegates and their families. Thank you to the educators, transition specialists, and families who helped us connect with these amazing young people over the past year. We look forward to yet another unforgettable July!

To learn more about the Missouri Youth Leadership Forum, including how to support or sponsor the event, visit our [MO-YLF website](#).

## THE ADA TURNS 36: CELEBRATE - LEARN - SHARE

by Claudia Browner

On July 26, 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law, establishing a vital foundation for the civil rights of people with disabilities. Thirty-six years later, we celebrate this historic milestone and the progress made toward a more accessible world.

Here is how you can get involved this month:

- **Celebrate & Share:** Post on social media using #ThanksToTheADA and #ADAAnniversary to share what accessibility means to you.
- **Attend Events:** Join local or virtual celebrations, or submit your own event to the ADA National Calendar.
- **Learn & Grow:** Explore the history of the ADA, listen to the ADA Live! podcast, or look into professional certification through the ADA Coordinator Training Certification Program (ACTCP).

Questions about accessibility? The ADA National Network provides free, confidential guidance and training through ten regional centers. Contact your local center at 1-800-949-4232.

**ADA**   
Americans with Disabilities Act

**36** **Celebrate**  
**July 26, 2026**

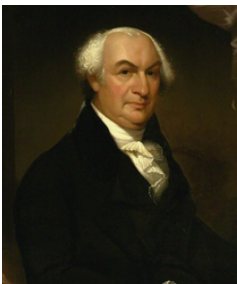
## SHAPING A NATION: LEADERS WITH DISABILITIES WHO BUILT AMERICAN HISTORY

by Reece Ellis

As we approach our country's America's semi quincentennial (250<sup>th</sup> birthday), communities across the nation are reflecting on the builders, dreamers, and leaders who shaped the United States over the last two and a half centuries. At the Missouri Youth Leadership Forum, we talk a lot about what it means to be a leader. Sometimes, history books leave out a crucial detail about the foundational figures who built our nation, many of them were leaders with disabilities.

Long before the modern disability rights movement existed, Americans with disabilities were pioneering the frontier, fighting for freedom, writing our founding documents, and leading the country through its darkest hours.

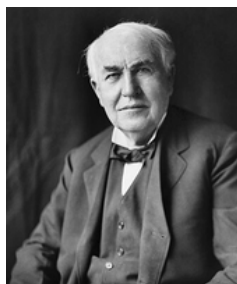
Here are a few incredible figures who helped build the America we know today:



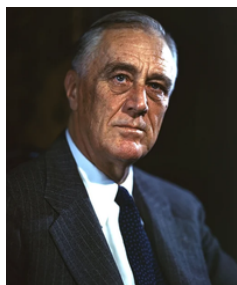
**Gouverneur Morris:** You might not know his name, but you definitely know his words. Morris was a brilliant Founding Father who lost his leg in a carriage accident and used a wooden peg leg, alongside having restricted use of one arm. Despite severe physical pain, he was one of the most vocal delegates at the Constitutional Convention and officially drafted the U.S. Constitution, personally penning the famous opening words: "We the People."



**Harriet Tubman:** As a teenager, Tubman suffered a severe traumatic brain injury that caused her to live with epilepsy, sudden seizures, and narcolepsy for the rest of her life. Undeterred, she became the most famous "conductor" of the Underground Railroad, risking her life to lead dozens of enslaved people to freedom. She later served as a scout, spy, and nurse for the Union Army during the Civil War. In her later years she fought for women's suffrage.



**Thomas Edison:** Deemed "addled" and a poor student by early teachers due to severe hearing loss that began in childhood, Edison grew up to completely modernize American life. He developed the incandescent lightbulb, the phonograph, and the motion picture camera, eventually building General Electric into an industrial powerhouse. He famously refused to view his profound deafness as a limitation, calling it a blessing in disguise because it blocked out the noisy distractions of the world and allowed him to focus entirely on his work.



**Franklin D. Roosevelt:** Paralyzed from the waist down after contracting polio in 1921, FDR navigated his presidency entirely from a wheelchair. Even though he often hid his condition from a public that wasn't yet ready to see it, voters backed him overwhelmingly. He became the only president elected to four terms, securing the largest electoral landslide victory in modern political history in 1936. From his wheelchair, he pulled the nation through the Great Depression and World War II, completely reshaping American life by signing into law foundational programs we still rely on today, like Social Security and the federal minimum wage.

Their lives show us that disability is not a footnote in the American story—it is a central part of it. Individuals with disabilities have always been at the forefront, shaping the culture, laws, and progress of our nation. As the United States looks forward to the next 250 years, this proud legacy of leadership and determination will undoubtedly continue to drive our country's history forward.

## ADVANCING ACCESSIBILITY: STATE TEAM MEMBERS COLLABORATE AT BUSINESS SUMMIT

by Claudia Browner



Employment inclusion took center stage in Columbia on May 7, as state agencies, local providers, and Mid-Missouri business leaders gathered for the AccessAbility Business Summit.

The event was a collaborative effort between team members from the Office of Administration's Governor's Council on Disability, Office of Equal Opportunity, Division of Personnel, and Information Technology Services Division partnered with Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation, Rehabilitation Services for the Blind, and local providers to bring this vital event to life.

Together, they welcomed more than 80 attendees, bridging the gap between motivated job seekers with disabilities and forward-thinking employers eager to tap into a broader talent pool. The summit wasn't just about networking, it was about providing real, actionable solutions for modern workplaces. Attendees gained invaluable insights through a robust lineup of sessions, including:

- Keynote presentation: Brian Nevins, a US Department of Transportation engineer, kicked off the day with a powerful address.
- Workplace Etiquette & Awareness: Breaking down barriers and fostering a welcoming and accessible workplace culture.
- Assistive Technology & Accommodations: Deep dives into assistive technology, accommodation strategies, and digital document accessibility.
- Real Perspectives: A panel discussion featuring both employers and employees with disabilities sharing their firsthand success stories.

The day concluded on a high note with a dynamic Hiring Showcase, giving job seekers the opportunity to interface directly with employers and workforce partners to discuss open roles.

The AccessAbility Business Summit reinforced a vital message: prioritizing employment inclusion makes Missouri stronger. By expanding equitable pathways to employment, businesses gain access to incredible, diverse talent, and individuals gain the platforms they deserve to thrive.

A huge thank you to all the OA team members, partner agencies, and attendees who dedicated their time and expertise to making this summit an overwhelming success!

## GOING FOR GOLD: MISSOURI STUDENTS SHINE AT STATEWIDE JOB OLYMPICS

by Claudia Browner



The energy of an athletic arena met the determination of the workforce as high school students from across the state gathered for the Statewide Job Olympics, hosted by the University of Missouri Pre-Employment Transition Services (MU Pre-ETS).

The Job Olympics gives students with disabilities a high-energy platform to showcase their vocational talents, build confidence, and connect with resource providers. The Governor's Council on Disability (GCD) was incredibly proud to support and participate in this year's event, cheering on participants and reinforcing the state's dedication to young Missourians entering the workforce.

Mirroring real-world workplace demands, students competed across a wide range of practical categories, including:

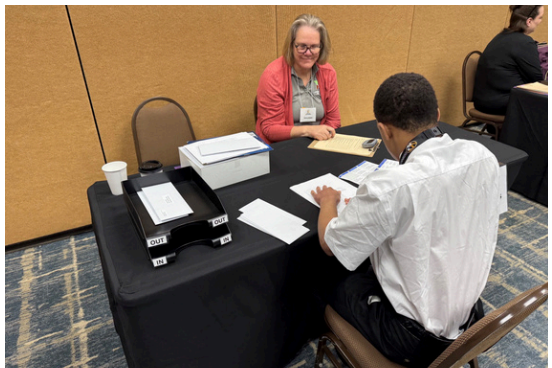
- Business Operations: Data entry, filing, and organization
- Retail & Hospitality: Grocery bagging, stock rotation, and cashiering
- Service Industries: Timed custodial tasks and food service prep

Beyond technical skills, students arrived dressed in business attire, completed job applications, and participated in formal interviews with local business partners, simulating the actual hiring process from start to finish.

The day kicked off with an enthusiastic opening ceremony and wrapped up with medals and ribbons to celebrate every participant's hard work. The highlight was seeing the unmistakable pride on the students' faces.

Supporting the Job Olympics is a natural extension of GCD's mission. These students are proving to themselves and to Missouri employers that they are ready and capable to bring their unique talents to our workforce.

Congratulations to all the competitors, and thank you to the MU Pre-ETS team, educators, and businesses who make this impactful event possible!



## ADVANCING DIGITAL INCLUSION AT 2026 ACCESSIBILITY SUMMIT

by Claudia Browner

The Office of Administration's Information Technology Services Division (ITSD) and Missouri Assistive Technology recently hosted the 2026 Digital Accessibility Summit. The event brought together state agencies and professionals to strengthen skills in web content and document accessibility, covering topics like Missouri's digital roadmap and best practices for collaborative web management.

The summit arrived at a pivotal moment. While the U.S. Department of Justice recently extended the ADA Title II web accessibility compliance deadline by one year to April 26, 2027, Missouri is taking a progressive approach—using the extra time to accelerate its momentum rather than slow down.

Topics included the State's digital accessibility roadmap, document and web management, and best practices for working together.

In honor of the 15th Annual Global Accessibility Awareness Day on May 21, the agencies launched the "No 'Click Here' Link Challenge." The initiative urged content creators to eliminate vague labels like "Click Here" or "Read More," which strip away vital context for screen reader users. The challenge was a resounding success, with state agencies successfully eliminating 73% of generic "click here" links across their platforms. This major reduction highlights Missouri's proactive commitment to digital equity ahead of the 2027 federal milestones.

More information on web accessibility can be found on the [Missouri Assistive Technology website](#).



## June 15 is World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD)

WEAAD reminds us that elder abuse has implications for all of us. It is a call to action for individuals, organizations, and communities to learn how to identify, address, and prevent elder abuse so we can all do our part to support everyone as they age.

This year, the theme for WEAAD is Building Strong Support for Elders. Take action today to prevent and address elder abuse and neglect:

- Call or visit an elderly friend, family member or neighbor
- Volunteer to help older adults in your community
- Participate in a 'Walk for WEAAD' event near you
- Report Elder Abuse when you witness it or become aware of it: [Missouri Adult Abuse and Neglect Hotline Online Reporting System](#) or call 1-800-392-0210

Find additional resources and information on the [WEAAD website](#).

## UPCOMING EVENTS

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

**July 14-18, 2026**

[Missouri Youth Leadership Forum, Columbia](#)

**July 19-22, 2026**

[National ADA Symposium, Phoenix, Arizona](#)

**July 23-24, 2026**

[APSE Missouri Annual Employment Summit, Columbia](#)

**August 23-25, 2026**

[Real Voices, Real Choices Conference, Lake Ozark](#)

**September 24, 2026**

[Disability Inclusion Summit, Kansas City](#)

**October 7-9, 2026**

[MACDDS Annual Conference, Columbia](#)

**November 18-20, 2026**

[Universal Design Summit 8, St. Louis](#)

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



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