

# GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITY

## GCD NEWSLETTER

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### CELEBRATING 81 YEARS OF NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH: RECOGNIZING VALUE AND TALENT ACROSS MISSOURI

BY CLAUDIA BROWNER

This October marks a major milestone, the 81st anniversary of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). Carried forward in alignment with America's 250th birthday, this year's national theme, "Celebrate Value and Talent," highlights the essential skills, leadership, and contributions that individuals with disabilities bring to our workplaces and communities every day.

First established by Congress in 1945 to support returning service members and led today by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), NDEAM reminds us of the critical progress achieved through landmark civil rights protections like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990.

Across Missouri, this observance serves as a vital call to action for employers, state agencies, and community partners to champion equal opportunity, eliminate barriers, and foster accessible work environments where all individuals can thrive.



### Advancing Employment and Accessibility Across Missouri

The 2026 theme challenges businesses, public agencies, and community organizations across the state to take proactive steps toward expanding employment access. Throughout October, partners across Missouri are encouraged to engage through practical initiatives:

Each year, the GCD hosts a statewide [Poster Contest](#) inviting local artists to create original artwork that highlights the skills and economic contributions of workers with disabilities. Organizations and agencies can raise awareness and showcase their commitment to accessible employment by displaying this year's winning poster in prominent public spaces, lobbies, and online platforms.

Employers and community organizations are also encouraged to host educational webinars, review reasonable accommodation processes, ensure digital platforms and application systems are fully accessible, and share success stories highlighting the career achievements of employees with disabilities.

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



573-751-2600



[gcd@oa.mo.gov](mailto:gcd@oa.mo.gov)

## ***Celebrating 81 Years of NDEAM, continued from page 1***

### **Statewide NDEAM Celebration & Resource Event**

To kick off October's observances, the Governor's Council on Disability and the Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) invites state team members, disability advocates, service providers, and the public to the annual Statewide NDEAM Celebration and Resource Event.

Hosted on October 1 in the Harry S Truman State Office Building, this program highlights networking opportunities with employment specialists and disability advocates, interactive resource tables, and the official presentation of the 2026 GCD Poster Contest Award winner.

This event offers an ideal venue to connect with community leaders, learn about statewide employment initiatives, and celebrate the advancements being made across Missouri's workforce. Complete details are available on the [Statewide NDEAM Celebration Page](#).



### **Statewide Resources and Engagement**

Missourians can access employment toolkits, accessibility guidelines, and downloadable promotional materials by visiting the [GCD NDEAM Webpage](#) and the [Missouri Disability Web Portal](#).

By collaborating across state government, local communities, and the private sector, Missouri continues to lead the way in recognizing talent, removing barriers, and creating meaningful employment opportunities for all.

## **AN INTERVIEW WITH DIANA KELLER, GCD NDEAM POSTER CONTEST WINNER**

by Angela Lenczycki, Office of Equal Opportunity

To bring awareness and active participation to National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), the Governor's Council on Disability (GCD) holds an annual poster contest. Any Missourian who is interested in participating can create a poster signifying NDEAM's message. 2026 is a special year, because in addition to the annual message of valuing workers with disabilities, we're celebrating the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United States' declaration of independence.

This year's contest winner, Office of Administration - Facilities Management Design and Construction (FMDC)'s own Diana Keller, was inspired by the American sentiment "One nation, under God, created equal". She wanted to honor the 250th anniversary of our nation and include the importance of every citizen and resident bringing individuality to our communities.

"Each of us have our own God-given gifts and if we're not utilizing those gifts, then we're missing out on those abilities that someone could have. Maybe they don't have the same skill set, but just because I can't sing, doesn't mean I wouldn't go somewhere and appreciate music. Just because someone can't paint doesn't mean that they don't have other talents," said Keller.

In her [poster](#), she painted a picturesque image of the Jefferson City capitol building lit up in USA's national colors and decorated with the American flag. Above the building is a rendering of the Declaration of Independence, expressing the line, "We hold these truths self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness". Detailed fireworks erupt above the scroll, each color of the firework representative of different disability awareness messages. The orange and red is representative of cognitive and intellectual disabilities, while the blue, pink, green and purple is to represent the Disability Pride Flag as a whole.

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**An Interview with Diana Keller, GCD NDEAM Poster Contest Winner, continued from page 2**

Keller is a mom of three children and a state employee of 6 years. She currently works for FMDC as a designer, and she is proud to mention that she considers the convenience of all people utilizing a space in her interior designs and layouts.

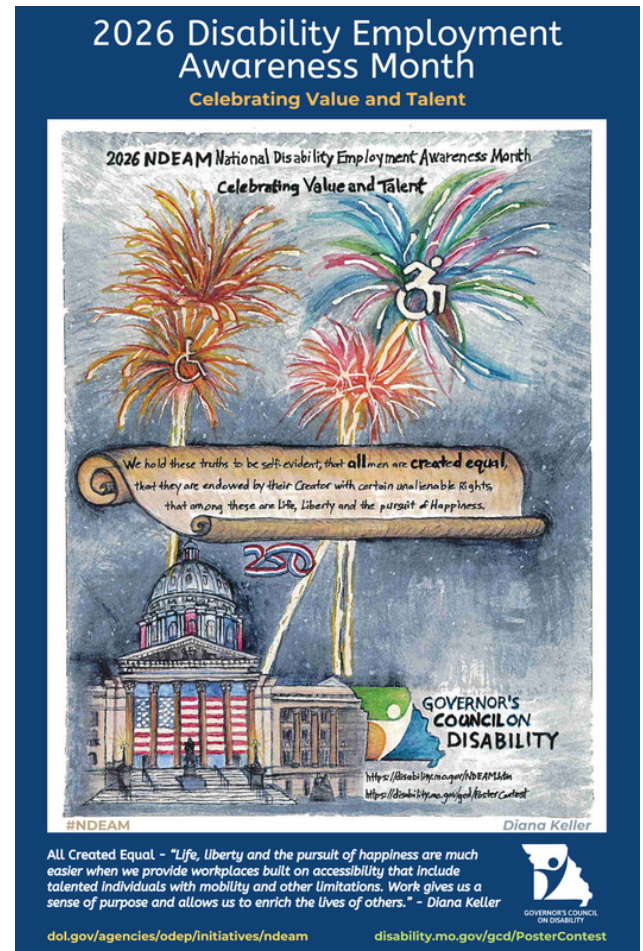
"Normally, I design spaces to make them user friendly. Wider aisles are great for everybody because you can pass each other without being claustrophobic. It's also helpful for people in wheelchairs. There's special equipment that we can add both to our leased buildings and our state buildings to make them more user friendly," said Keller.

However, even with being conscientious of those needing accommodations in the workplace, sometimes roadblocks arise. Keller stated, "My plea would be for people that are making budgetary decisions to invest in the workers and invest in the clients, make it easier for them to come to work. Make it easier for them to serve others."

In addition to her professional endeavors, Keller enjoys gardening, bicycling, and teaching her kids the importance of giving back. Keller stated that the last two summers, she and her family joined World Gospel Outreach in Honduras. In Summer of 2023, they worked with Send Relief in Ferguson, Missouri.

Keller expressed she loved "seeing the hearts of the people and how lives are impacted and changed in a positive way, when you give back to the community." She also enjoys participating in charities for the national Kids Across America (KAA) scholarship. According to their website, the organization "serves thousands of campers, mentors, and families each year while continuing to deepen its commitment to discipleship, leadership development, and year-round engagement. What began as a single week of camp has grown into a dynamic ministry dedicated to shaping lives, strengthening leaders, and building communities rooted in faith, resilience, and hope." In order to raise money for the scholarship, she biked 500 miles in one week in support of KAA. "We had sponsorships per mile, and then they give the money to the kids across America for their scholarship," explained Keller.

In addition to expressing gratitude for receiving the winning award for GCD's NDEAM Poster Contest, Keller also wanted to pass along the message that everyone can make an impact and a difference. "I would encourage others to just find somewhere that they can participate and make a difference. Something on their own, or just by encouraging somebody else to make that difference alongside someone. Our world would be a very boring place if everyone looked the same; if everyone did the same thing. That's why God made each of us unique. Each with purpose and each with talents, some of us just haven't discovered them yet. Christ transforms lives, we are simply reflections of his grace and compassion."



**“Everyone has value and should be treated respectfully. When workplaces are designed to allow everyone to contribute their part, our whole society benefits.”**  
- Diana Keller

## KNOWING YOUR RIGHTS: VOTING ACCESS FOR MISSOURIANS WITH DISABILITIES

by Reece Ellis

The right to vote (sometimes called the political franchise) is the cornerstone to our republican form of government and to democracies the world over. Missouri's constitution guarantees the right to vote without barriers to all law-abiding citizens, including individuals with disabilities.

There are four federal laws that protect the right to vote independently and privately:

The Voting Rights Act of 1965

The Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act of 1984

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and

The Help America Vote Act of 2002.

Together, they guarantee physical access to polling places, accessible voting equipment, and your right to assistance from a person of your choosing. No election worker can turn you away because they assume your disability makes you unqualified to vote.

As the November election approaches, here is what you need to know to exercise that right, whether you plan to vote in person, by mail, or curbside.



### What to Bring

Missouri requires an unexpired, government-issued photo ID to vote, such as a Missouri driver's or nondriver's license or a U.S. passport. If you need a nondriver's license for identification purposes, you can get one at no cost from any Missouri license office. If you arrive without an acceptable ID, you can still vote using a provisional ballot. That ballot will count once you return with the correct ID or if your signature on the provisional envelope matches the signature on file with your county.

If a disability or illness prevents you from voting in person, you can request an absentee ballot that does not need to be notarized. Applications are due by 5:00 p.m. on the second Wednesday before the election.

### Voting In Person

Every polling place in Missouri is required to have at least one accessible voting machine. These machines include tactile controls for voters with limited use of their hands and audio ballot options for voters who are blind or have low vision. Bring your own headphones if you prefer, or ask a poll worker for a pair.

If you cannot stand in line, tell a poll worker. They can bring you a chair or move you through more quickly. If your condition keeps you from entering the polling place at all, curbside voting is available at every location on Election Day. Ask anyone at the entrance to alert poll workers, and someone will bring your ballot to your vehicle.

You have the right to bring a person of your choice into the voting booth to help you, with one exception: your employer or union representative cannot serve as that helper. If you do not have someone with you, two poll workers, one from each major party, will assist you as you direct.

If your polling place isn't accessible – you can report it. The Election Protection hotline can be reached at 1-866-OUR-VOTE so issues can be fixed before the next election. Additionally, you can ask your Election Authority about alternatives, including a different accessible location or curbside voting.

### Key Dates to Know

**Election Day:** Tuesday, November 3, 2026

**Last Day to Register to Vote:** Wednesday, October 7, 2026, by 5:00 p.m.

**Last Day to Request an Absentee Ballot:** Wednesday, October 21, 2026 (email, fax, or postmarked by mail)

**In-Person Absentee Voting:** Available now through Monday, November 2, 2026, at your local Election Authority office

**Absentee Ballot Return Deadline:** Tuesday, November 3, 2026, by 7:00 p.m.

## ELECTION TERMS, EXPLAINED

by Reece Ellis

Ballots can be confusing, especially if this is your first time voting or if you're helping someone else understand theirs. This guide breaks down the words you're likely to see on your November ballot, starting simple and building up.

An **election** is a day when people vote to choose leaders or decide on a law. A **ballot** is the form you use to vote. It lists the candidates and any questions you're being asked to decide.

Missouri holds a few different kinds of elections:

- A **general election** is the main event. This is when you vote for the candidates and issues that will actually take effect.
- A **primary election** happens before the general election, when a political party has too many people running for the same office. Party members vote to narrow the field down to one candidate per party, who then moves on to the general election.
- A **special election** happens outside the normal schedule, usually because an elected official left office early and their seat needs to be filled right away.

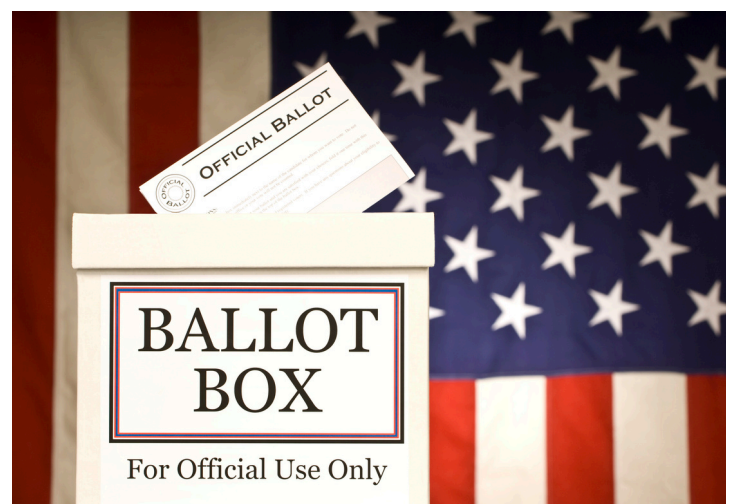
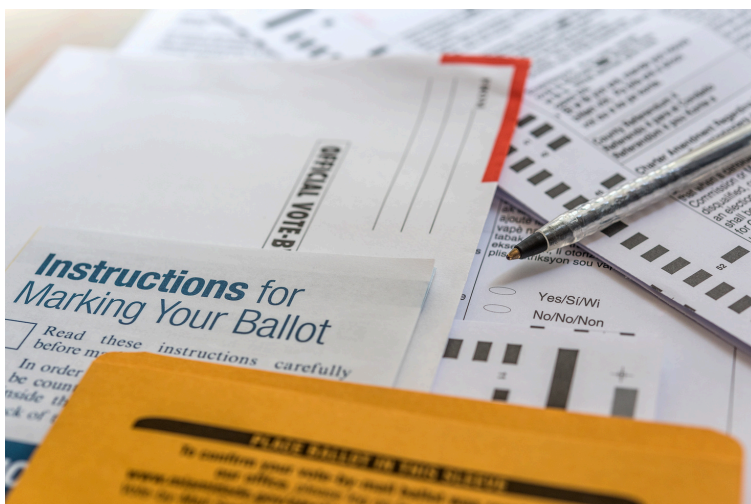
Sometimes your ballot doesn't just ask you to pick a person. It asks you to vote directly on a law. This is called a **ballot measure**, and in Missouri, you might also hear it called a **ballot initiative**, a **proposition**, or a **referendum**. All these mean roughly the same thing: a question you answer with "yes" or "no." If most voters vote yes, the measure becomes law. If most vote no, it doesn't.

A **citizen-led initiative petition** is one way a ballot measure gets on the ballot in the first place. Instead of legislators writing and passing a bill, everyday Missourians write a proposed law themselves and collect a set number of signatures from registered voters across the state. If they gather enough valid signatures, the measure goes to voters for a final decision.

A **legislative referendum** works differently. In this case, the Missouri General Assembly is the one that votes to send a measure to the ballot, rather than citizens gathering signatures. This session, for example, lawmakers voted to send a measure on eliminating the state income tax to voters this past August. Because it came from the legislature rather than a petition, it's a legislative referendum rather than a citizen-led initiative.

A **constitutional amendment** is a specific type of ballot measure that changes the wording of the Missouri Constitution itself, rather than a regular state law. Constitutional amendments can come from the legislature or from a citizen petition, just like other ballot measures. They tend to carry extra weight because the constitution is harder to change again later than an ordinary law is.

Ballot language on the actual form is often written in dense legal wording, not the plain language above. Before Election Day, you can look up a sample ballot through [ballotpedia.org](https://ballotpedia.org) or your local Election Authority to see exactly what's on it and what a "yes" or "no" vote means for each measure. If anything is unclear, your local election office can walk you through it. That's what they're there for!



## REMEMBERING COUNCIL MEMBER CHARLES "CHUCK" COMSTOCK, II: A LEGACY OF FEARLESS ADVOCACY AND INNOVATION

by Claudia Browner

The Governor's Council on Disability is deeply saddened by the passing of our esteemed Council Member, colleague, and dear friend, Charles "Chuck" Comstock, II. Chuck was a fearless, tireless champion for the disability community across Missouri, dedicating his life to breaking down barriers and opening doors for others.

An honorable Air Force veteran, past president of Rural Advocates for Independent Living (RAIL), and dedicated advocacy specialist, Chuck brought a wealth of leadership and perspective to his longtime service on the Council, leaving a permanent mark on statewide accessibility efforts.

Whenever Chuck encountered an obstacle, he did not see a limitation, but rather an opportunity for innovation. With his trademark ingenuity, practical creativity, and determination, he designed adaptive tools and custom solutions to conquer daily challenges, proving to everyone around him that accessibility is always possible with the right mindset. His impact reached deeply into the next generation through his passionate mentorship at the Missouri Youth Leadership Forum (MO-YLF), where his wisdom, encouragement, quick wit, and natural gift for storytelling inspired countless young leaders to embrace their potential, advocate for themselves, and lead with pride.

His humor brought warmth and levity to every meeting and room he entered, leaving a lasting impression on everyone who had the privilege of working alongside him. Yet, above all his professional accomplishments, Chuck's greatest pride and joy was his family. Our thoughts, prayers, and deepest condolences are with his beloved wife, Melissa, and his cherished daughters, Arianna and Bianca.

We remain profoundly grateful for Chuck's leadership, service, and friendship; his legacy will undoubtedly live on in the countless lives he touched and the barriers he tore down.



## THE 2026 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES POLL IS WAITING FOR YOU

by Laura Mueth

The annual Legislative Priorities Poll is now open. If you have not completed it or shared it with others, now is the time. As we approach the new legislative session, completing the Priorities Poll is a means to educate new and returning legislators.

With the topics of accessibility, education, assistance services and health care, housing, employment, and transportation, it could even be a way to think about concerns to raise with candidates as they knock on doors and hold events in the weeks preceding the November election.

All available formats can be found on the [Legislative Priorities Poll](#) web page. Our staff is available to assist anyone who has difficulty understanding the questions or completing it independently.



To receive assistance, call 800-877-8249. Please return all Polls by 5:00 p.m. on Monday, November 2, 2026. Non-online versions can be returned via fax (573-526-4109), email ([gcd@oa.mo.gov](mailto:gcd@oa.mo.gov)), and mail (Governor's Council on Disability, 301 West High Street, Room 620, PO Box 1668, Jefferson City, MO 65102-1668). The results will be shared by the end of this year or early 2027.

## Missouri's No Wrong Door Link and Learn Series

This series is designed to bring together partners across aging, disability, and other service systems to learn together, build connections, and strengthen collaboration at the regional level. The first event, Enhancing Person-Centered Supports Across the Lifespan, is being offered across eight Missouri regions throughout September and October.



These full-day, interactive events are an opportunity to:

- Explore practical Charting the LifeCourse tools and strategies
- Connect with local partners across aging, disability and other service systems
- Strengthen person-centered approaches across systems
- Build relationships and identify opportunities for collaboration
- Contribute to a shared vision for person-centered long-term services and supports in Missouri

### Upcoming Dates:

**October 13 - St. Charles, October 23 - Springfield, October 27 - Cape Girardeau, October Date TBD - St. Louis**

Space is limited. If you support, plan with, advocate alongside or help individuals and families access long-term services and supports, we want you at the table.

For more information and to complete the Regional Link and Learn Interest Form, please see the attached flyer and check out the project page: <https://lifecoursenexus.org/mo-no-wrong-door/>

## UPCOMING EVENTS

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

**October 1, 2026**

**Statewide NDEAM Celebration, Jefferson City**

**October 7-8, 2026**

**Starkloff Disability Employment Summit, St. Louis**

**October 7-9, 2026**

**MACDDS Annual Conference, Columbia**

**October 20-21, 2026**

**Missouri Brain Injury Association (BIA-MO) Annual Statewide Conference, St. Louis**

**November 2-4, 2026**

**Missouri Association of Area Agencies on Aging (MA4) Show Me Summit on Aging & Health, 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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