



# Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

CREATING CHANGE • IMPROVING LIVES

## 2024 Legislative Overview

April 2024

This overview highlights some of the budgets and key pieces of legislation from the 2024 legislative session. It focuses on the issues that were important to people with developmental disabilities and their families.

The Council was very involved with the legislative session from start to finish. We worked with General Assembly leaders to create plain language and easy read versions of the House and Senate rules. This made it so all Marylanders could better understand the legislative process. Throughout the session, the Council tracked 173 bills and took action on 89 of them. We co-hosted Developmental Disabilities Day at the Legislature, giving advocates across the state a chance to connect with legislators about important issues.

It didn't stop there! This year, 5 Council members came to Annapolis to testify in the House and Senate. Council Chair Dee Sapp, Vice Chair Meghan Jones, and members Angie Auldridge, Meeka Caldwell, and Tiffany Joseph shared stories and experiences to show why each bill was important.

We are proud of the work we did alongside people with developmental disabilities, their families, other organizations, and legislators to create change for people with developmental disabilities.

Thank you to our Council members for being a central part of that advocacy this year. Together, we supported numerous bills that will help Marylanders with and without disabilities live, learn, work, and play together. Keep reading below to learn about some of the legislation we focused on this year.



# Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) Budget

## Fiscal Year 2025: July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025

What is the money for?	What is the increase in money?	What will this money do?
DDA Community Services	\$58 million (General and Federal Funds)	This provides a 3% rate increase for community services.
Transitioning Youth	\$14.2 million (General and Federal Funds)	This provides services to about 566 eligible youth who leave high school.
Emergencies	\$13.9 million (General Funds)	This provides community services to about 39 people in emergency situations.
Waiting List	\$14.2 million (General and Federal Funds)	This provides community services to about 212 people on the waiting list with the most urgent needs.
Waiting List Equity Fund	\$1.125 million (General and Federal Funds)	This provides community services to about 38 people on the waiting list with the oldest caregivers.
Low Intensity Support Services	\$5.5 million (General Funds)	This provides short-term, low-cost support to about 2,854 people and their families.
Housing	\$1 million (General Funds)	This provides rental subsidies for people to move into their own homes.

**Additional funds are included in the budget to continue providing services to people already receiving services. DDA's FY 2025 Community Services budget is more than \$2.1 billion.**

*All data (amounts of money) provided by the DDA.*

# DDA Reports and Actions Required

The Maryland Department of Health must send the following reports to the Maryland General Assembly budget committees:

- One report about the ongoing transition to a fee-for-service system and the amount of money spent for that system this year. This report must include specific information about the use and amount of money spent for each type of service provided.
- One report on the money given to providers up front in FY 2023 and FY 2024 during the providers' transition to the Low Intensity Support Services system.
- One report on self-directed services and spending for Individual and Family Directed Goods and Services (IFDGS). This report must include the number of people in self-directed services, the number of IFDGS requests, the amount for each request, and details about the process to approve IFDGS requests with recommendations to improve the process. DDA also needs to compare self-directed services to provider-run services for the following:
  - the number of people in each service model,
  - the approved budgets and the total amount spent, and
  - details about how budgets are developed and how the process and resulting budgets differ.



Photos from DD Day at the Legislature, February 2024



***“I advise several families every year about DDA services, so I know that every dollar is necessary to serve current families and so many more to come.”*** – Council member Meeka Caldwell in her testimony on the DDA Budget.

# Priority Bills in the 2024 Legislative Session

The Council’s vision is for people with and without disabilities in Maryland to live, learn, work, and play together. We actively worked on a lot of important bills this year to advance this mission. Some of these bills are listed below. Please visit [the Legislative Reports page](#) on our website to view the full list of bills we took action on in 2024.

Live

## **HB 215/SB 226: Human Services – Attendant Care Program – Ongoing Additional Supports**

This bill adds “ongoing additional supports” as something the Attendant Care Program can reimburse people for. This increases flexibility and recognizes that more people are using technology, delivery services, and service animals to increase independence instead of relying on other people. ***The bill passed.***

## **HB 336/SB 592: Maryland Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Program – Materials for Individualized Education Program, Individualized Family Service Plan, and 504 Plan Meetings**

This bill requires information about the Maryland ABLE Program be provided at least one time a year at a child’s Individualized Family Service Plan meeting, and a student’s Individualized Education Program or 504 plan team meeting. ABLE accounts make it possible for people with disabilities and their families to save money without losing the federal and state benefits they need. ***The bill passed.***

## **HB 432: Courts and Judicial Proceedings and Criminal Procedure – Technical Corrections – References to Intellectual Disability**

This bill removes outdated language in the Courts and Judicial Proceedings and Criminal Procedure laws (the rules used by the courts) and replaces it with “intellectual disability.” ***The bill passed.***



***“Marylanders with disabilities, like myself, deserve the same respect that everyone else gets.”***

– Council Vice Chair Meghan Jones in her testimony to the House Judiciary Committee on HB 432.



**“For many families, [there are] barriers that make getting a service animal impossible, leaving people without the life-giving assistance they can provide.”** – Council member Angie Auldridge in her testimony to the Senate Finance Committee on SB 796.

### **SB 202: Department of Aging – Caregiver Expense Grant Program – Established**

This bill establishes the Caregiver Expense Grant Program to help family members with expenses related to the care and support of their family member with disabilities. This applies to children and adults with developmental disabilities if the family member supporting them is 55 years or older. Eligible family members can get up to \$2,500. **The bill passed.**

### **SB 796: Maryland Disability Service Animal Program – Established**

This bill would have created the Maryland Disability Service Animal Program in the Department of Disabilities to help people with disabilities get service animals, and provide funding – if it is available – to organizations in Maryland that train service animals. **The bill did not pass.**

## **Voting**

*Voting is a fundamental right that everyone deserves. People with disabilities want and need access to the voting process. But, they are more likely to face difficulties voting than those without disabilities.*

The Council opposed 3 bills that would have made voting harder for people with disabilities:

### **HB 142: Election Law – Polling Places – Establishing Voter Identity**

### **HB 192: Elections – In-Person Voting – Proof of Identity**

### **HB 202: Election Law – Absentee Ballots – Signature Requirements and Verification**

**None of these bills passed.**

The Council supported 4 bills that would have made voting easier for people with disabilities:

### **HB 563: Election Law – Local Boards of Elections – Language-Related Assistance**

This bill would have required local election boards to provide all written materials in other languages if 2% of the people in the county spoke a language other than English. ***The bill did not pass.***

### **HB 641: Election Law – Curbside Voting**

This bill would have required each local election board to make an outside location available for curbside voting. Curbside voting would have been available to any voter who asks for it. The state and local election boards would have been required to tell people about curbside voting, but when they did, they would have had to say it will be mostly used as an accommodation for voters with disabilities. ***The bill did not pass.***

### **HB 1342: Elections – Ballot Questions – Publication of Proposed Laws and Plain Language Summary**

This bill would have required state and local boards of elections to write ballot questions and other statements in plain, easy-to-understand language. ***The bill did not pass.***

### **HB 1343/SB 495: Election Law – Petitions and Ballot Questions – Plain Language Requirement**

This bill would have required that ballot questions and other statements be written in plain language. ***The bill did not pass.***



The Council supports legislation that gives people with disabilities better access to voting.

## Learn

### **HB 901/SB 967: Higher Education – Part-Time Senatorial and Delegate Scholarships – Alterations**

This bill allows the Maryland Higher Education Commission to waive certain requirements for college students with disabilities to be eligible for Senatorial and Delegate scholarships. For example, a student with a disability can still get a scholarship if they are taking less than 6 hours of classes in a semester or if they are taking a college course but not getting a college degree. **The bill passed.**

*The Council supports policies and laws that increase access to higher education for people with disabilities. You can learn more about [past Council projects](#) about this on our website.*

### **HB 903/SB 797: Education – Access to Attorneys, Advocates, and Consultants for Special Education Program and Fund – Established**

This bill establishes the Access to Attorneys, Advocates, and Consultants for Special Education Program. The purpose of the program is to provide funding for resources and services to eligible students with disabilities and their families who need legal, advocacy, and consultant services. \$1 million was added to the FY25 budget for the program. **The bill passed.**

*The Council worked closely with the Education Advocacy Coalition, legislators, and other stakeholders because many families need and want advocacy support as they navigate the special education process for their children. There are few free and low cost options available. By allowing low and lower income families to access assistance, more families will be able to get the advice, support, and representation that other families are able to secure on their own, and will be better able to address difficult issues with their child’s team.*



**“Children with disabilities have the right to a free, appropriate public education. They need and want to learn and play together at school.**

**This program would help parents [with a disability] like me access the help I need to make sure my child gets the education they need to be successful.”** – Council member Tiffany Joseph in her testimony to the House Ways and Means Committee on HB 903.

## Work

### **HB 822/SB 790: Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Employed Individuals with Disabilities**

This bill makes changes to the Employed Individuals with Disabilities Program (EID) to make sure more people with disabilities can work and get the support they need to do so. It eliminates the income limit, makes the application process easier and requires the use of plain language, and requires the Department to get feedback from stakeholders and report to the General Assembly about expanding eligibility to people age 65 and older. **The bill passed.**

### **HB 1163/SB 859: State Department of Education – Division of Rehabilitation Services - Funding**

This bill allows the Governor to include money in the budget to cover the required state match amount for the federal funding. The Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) is Maryland’s vocational rehabilitation program. DORS receives most of its funding from a grant from the U.S. Department of Education to provide support for people with disabilities to go to work, stay at a job, and prepare for the world of work. Funding the state match makes sure Maryland gets the federal funds. **The bill passed.**

## Play

### **HB 420: State and Local Parks – Play Area Accessibility – Recreation Communication Boards Pilot Program**

This bill creates the Maryland Recreation Communication Boards Pilot Program in the Department of Natural Resources. The purpose of the program is to make playgrounds more accessible by covering the costs of purchasing and installing communication boards at state and local parks. Local governments can apply for money when they build a new playground or change an existing playground. Communication boards allow people with limited language to express their needs and wants by using images that represent words or ideas. This is one of many actions needed to make our playgrounds places where people with and without disabilities learn and play together. **The bill passed.**



The Council supports efforts to make playgrounds more accessible and inclusive for everyone.



The Council, in partnership with the Maryland Department of Disabilities, created a framework and toolkit to support inclusive playgrounds across the state. We focused on playgrounds because they are an important part of communities. Everyone deserves a chance to play! When a playground is truly inclusive, everyone can access all parts in a meaningful way. The framework explains how to move from access to inclusion and includes toolkits about how to make that happen. [The framework is available on our website.](#)

### **HB 773/SB 597: Human Services – Individuals with Disabilities and Service-Disabled Veterans Boating Fund**

This bill creates a grant program to fund organizations that offer water sports opportunities for people with disabilities, including veterans with disabilities. Water sports include sailing, kayaking, canoeing, paddleboarding, and surfing. This bill gives people with disabilities more recreation opportunities. ***The bill passed.***

## Creating Change

The Council created change during the legislative session that improved lives. We did that by bringing together people with developmental disabilities, their family members, organizations, and others. We know it takes partnerships to continue to create change, and our work includes making new connections. That led us to formally partner with the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs.

Military families of children and adults with developmental disabilities have unique needs. Through this partnership, the Council will learn from military and veteran families who have family members with a developmental disability about what they need and want. We will develop information and resources based on what we learn to build and share a toolkit about the services and supports available to people with developmental disabilities of all ages. With more information and resources available to them, military and veteran families of children and adults with developmental disabilities are more likely to thrive in Maryland.

As part of this work, the Council supported the following bill during the legislative session.

### **HB 431/SB 411: Department of Veterans Affairs – Renaming and Deputy Secretary of Military Family Policy and Programs**

This bill renames the Department of Veterans Affairs to the Department of Veterans and Military Families. It also requires the Secretary to appoint a Deputy Secretary of Military Family Policy and Programs. ***The bill passed.***

# By the Numbers



The Maryland General Assembly **reviewed 2,711 bills**.  
**1,053** of the bills **passed and became laws**.

The Council **took action on 89 bills**. The Council **watched, but did not take action on another 84 bills**.



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