



2026 Legislative Overview

The 2026 Maryland legislative session was difficult for the disability community. Disability services faced large budget cuts for the second year in a row. The Council, along with our partners in the Developmental Disabilities Coalition (DD Coalition) and advocates from across the state, worked together to reduce the impact of these cuts.

Our collective advocacy made an impact and we cannot thank you enough. You showed up and made a difference! The General Assembly and Governor restored a total of \$59.1 million in general funds: \$23.1 million in FY 2027 and \$36 million to address a FY 2026 shortfall identified by DDA in March. This is more than they restored for any other single issue in the whole state budget. Still, cuts went through and they will impact the lives of people with developmental disabilities, their families, and the providers and staff they rely on. The legislative session may be over, but our work is never done.

In addition to our budget advocacy, the Council worked on many bills during the legislative session. We tracked 134 bills and took action on 77 of them. We supported bills on education, services and supports, housing, criminal justice, voting rights, transportation, and more. All of the bills we supported will create change and improve lives for people with developmental disabilities and their families.

Keep reading to learn more.



Developmental Disabilities Administration Budget

The Governor's proposed budget for FY 2027 included \$155.4 million in general funds (\$310.8 million total funds with the federal match) in budget cuts to the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA).

After the budget was released, advocates came together to save our services. The Council and DD Coalition met with budget leaders in the General Assembly and the Governor's Office to educate them on the importance of this funding.

The General Assembly restored \$23.1 million in general funds (\$46.2 million in total funds) to the DDA budget. This is the largest restoration of funds for any part of the state budget. This shows the strength of advocacy from people with disabilities, families, providers, professionals, and the whole community.

The General Assembly also rejected the proposal to cap person-centered plan budgets at \$500,000. Budget leaders clearly understood the impact that the original proposal would have on people with the most significant disabilities.

The final FY 2027 budget still includes \$126.9 million in general fund cuts to DDA that impact every person who receives services: those who choose to get services from a provider and those who choose to self-direct their services.

Supplemental Budget

During final budget talks, budget leaders found out that DDA was spending more money than expected this year. The Governor's Supplemental Budget No. 2 added \$36 million in general funds (\$72 million in total funds) for FY 2026 to cover that shortfall. Without this, DDA would have faced an additional \$36 million cut in general funds this year.

In addition, the supplemental budget included \$2.6 million for an independent review of DDA operations and \$5 million to strengthen oversight. These investments are intended to improve how DDA manages its funding and may help prevent future cuts.

We appreciate the efforts of budget leaders and the Governor's office to restore funding for FY 2026 and FY 2027. However, the disability community still faces a \$126.9 million reduction next year.

The Council will continue to advocate for these important services for Marylanders with disabilities. While we are encouraged that additional safeguards may help prevent future cuts, we recognize that the current reductions will still have a real impact on people's lives. There is more work ahead.

DDA Reports and Actions Required

The budget requires DDA to submit detailed reports to the General Assembly budget committees. These reports have to explain the cost containment actions (cuts) in FY 2027. These reports must include:

- The number of people impacted by each action
- Timelines and status of implementing each action
- Updated savings estimates
- Impacts on staff wages
- Changes to long term services and supports (LTSS) rates
- Implementation and enforcement of the dedicated hours policy
- Medicaid waiver enrollment and waiver operations
- Medicaid disenrollment trends and reasons for coverage loss

These reports show that the General Assembly wants more transparency and oversight on how these policies affect the community.



Photos from Developmental Disabilities Day at the Legislature in Annapolis on February 18.

Advocacy in Action

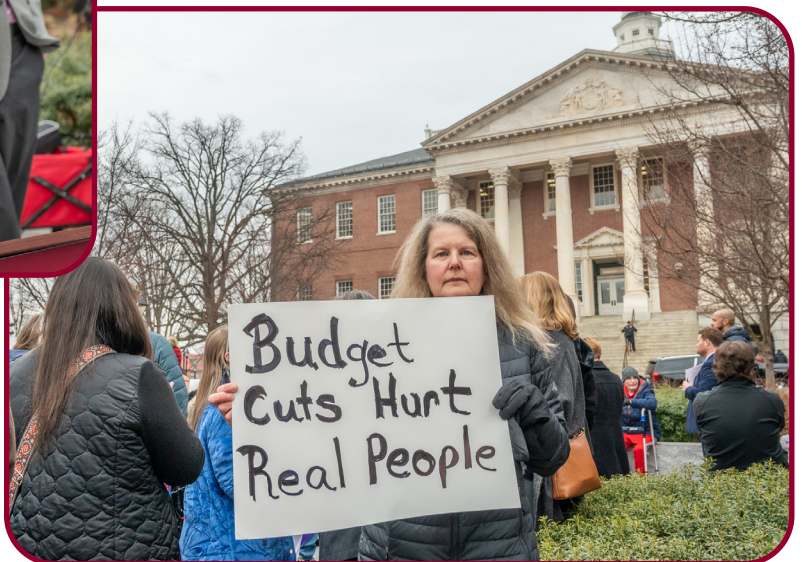
The Council creates change in many ways. We bring people together to find solutions to problems. We advise leaders and provide important information and resources. We empower people with developmental disabilities and their families to advocate for themselves.

During the legislative session, hundreds of people with disabilities, families, providers, and professionals came to Annapolis to share their stories and oppose the budget cuts. They met with legislators. They testified in hearings. They gathered in front of the State House for two rallies to save our services. The General Assembly noticed!

Hundreds of people with disabilities, family members, and professionals gathered in front of the State House twice during the session: on February 18 after DD Day, and again on March 12.



These advocates rallied to oppose the DDA budget cuts. Their messages were clear: "These Are Our Lives" and "We Won't Go Back."



Priority Bills in the 2026 Legislative Session

The Council's vision is for people with and without disabilities in Maryland to live, learn, work, and play together. This year, we worked on a lot of important bills to support that goal. Some of these bills are highlighted below. You can find the full list of bills we took action on in 2026 on the [Legislative Reports page](#) of our website.

LIVE

Services

During the 2026 legislative session, the Council worked with people with disabilities, families, legislators, and state agencies to protect and strengthen home- and community-based services. The Council advocated for legislation that safeguards Medicaid eligibility, improves access to services for people moving to Maryland after the loss of a caregiver, and promotes transparency and public input in policies that affect services. Through collaboration with the DD Coalition, the Council educated policymakers to make sure people with disabilities can maintain the supports they need to live and work in their communities.

HB 1445/SB 742: Home- and Community-Based Services Eligibility Determinations (Maryland Protecting People with Disabilities Act)

This bill puts federal requirements into Maryland law. It will prevent Marylanders with disabilities from losing Medicaid and home- and community-based waiver services because of administrative or procedural errors. It requires the State to meet timelines and provide support to help prevent people from losing Medicaid and waiver services, and to help them regain coverage if it has ended. It also prohibits the State from ending someone's Medicaid coverage if the State did not meet its responsibilities to keep that person continuously enrolled. It requires the State to restore Medicaid eligibility for people who were disenrolled for certain reasons. **This bill passed.**

Maryland is required to follow federal rules related to Medicaid applications, and decisions about eligibility and renewals of benefits. When rules are not followed and people with disabilities lose their Medicaid and waiver eligibility, they are at increased risk of institutionalization and loss of services. Because of our advocacy and work with the Maryland Department of Health, the bill passed in a way that everyone supported.

HB 1015/SB 721: Developmental Disabilities Services - Expedited Eligibility Determinations for Recently Relocated Individuals (Ralph's Act)

This bill makes it faster for people with developmental disabilities moving to Maryland from another state to get services if they have gotten services in the other state for 10 years, and are moving to Maryland to live with a family member upon the death or loss of a parent or other primary caregiver. In these rare and urgent situations, it allows the Maryland Department of Health to start the process even before the person officially becomes a resident. **This bill passed.**

Ralph's Act offers a thoughtful and practical way to support families going through very difficult situations. It makes sure that people who have been receiving home- and community-based services in another state aren't left without help if they have to move to Maryland after losing a caregiver.

HB 1593/SB 583: Community Pathways Waiver - Adoption of Regulations

This bill would have required the DDA to provide notice to the public before making changes to the Self-Directed Services Manual and would have required DDA to allow at least 90 days for public comment before any change can take effect. **This bill did not pass. The House passed a different version of this bill that would have required the Department of Health to develop regulations implementing the Community Pathways Waiver.**

The Council and DD Coalition educated the committees about why it is important that people have the opportunity to review and comment. We worked with the sponsors and the Department of Health to make sure people had the opportunity to comment on all policies, procedures, and guidance that will affect their services, including the Self-Directed Services Manual.



The Council supports bills that protect services and supports for Marylanders with developmental disabilities so they can live, work, and participate in their communities.

Housing

The Council advocates for policies, practices, and laws that support more housing options that are affordable and accessible, and allow people with and without developmental disabilities to live in the community together.

HB 226/SB 22: Department of Disabilities - Housing Programs and Affiliated Foundations - Establishment

This bill lets the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD) create independent, non-government foundations to support its programs. These foundations can raise funds, apply for grants, and enter into partnerships to benefit MDOD programs that support assistive technology, employment, and affordable housing. ***This bill passed.***

HB 573/SB 274: Fair Housing and Housing Discrimination - Regulations, Intent, and Discriminatory Effect

This bill allows the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to make rules about actively promoting fair housing. It makes it illegal for anyone to act in a way that results in discrimination, even if they didn't intend to discriminate. ***This bill passed.***



The Council supports bills that give people with disabilities better access to affordable housing that works for them.

Transportation

The Council advocates for policies that increase access to reliable and accessible transportation options throughout Maryland.

HB 58: Transportation - Paratransit Services - Interjurisdictional Routes

This bill would have required counties to include a plan that provides transportation for people with disabilities and older adults across county lines in their application for funding to the Department of Transportation. The plan would have included transportation to certain facilities across those county lines. ***This bill did not pass.***

HB 733: Maryland Transit Administration - Fixed-Route Transit Services - Announcements

This bill would have required the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) to announce all stops and other important information on all bus, subway, and light rail routes. These announcements would have been made in both real-time audio and text. **This bill did not pass.**

HB 1242: Transportation of Persons with Disabilities - Transportation Network Companies - Requirements

This bill would have required transportation network companies like Uber and Lyft that contract with the Maryland Transit Administration to serve people with disabilities to conduct an annual background screening of all drivers. It also exempts them from doing a complete background check through the Criminal Justice Information System Central Repository. **This bill did not pass.**

Accessible transportation is one of the biggest barriers for people with disabilities to participate in their communities. People with disabilities rely on affordable, accessible public transportation to go grocery shopping, attend medical appointments, to socialize, and to spend time with family. Being able to move easily around our neighborhoods, cities, and towns is essential for a high quality of life. For this reason, the Council supports legislation that improves access to reliable and effective transportation for Marylanders with disabilities.

Safety

The Council advocates for policies that make people with developmental disabilities safer. This includes policies that improve interactions with law enforcement, and policies that improve support for people with disabilities in jails and prisons.

HB 634/SB 745: Police Training - Autism and Dementia (LEAD Act of 2026)

This bill requires all police officers get training about how to locate someone who wanders, elopes, or goes missing. The new training will be required for new officers and as ongoing training. **This bill passed.**



The Council supports policies that improve interactions between law enforcement and people with disabilities.

The Council worked with our partners in the Maryland Autism Coalition to make sure amendments to this bill included training about wandering and elopement by all people with developmental disabilities, not just those with autism and dementia. This training will be in addition to the general training about how to interact with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

HB 310/SB 268: Correctional Services - Restrictive Housing - Individuals with Developmental or Intellectual Disabilities

This bill would have required clinical staff in prisons to assess each newly incarcerated person for an intellectual or developmental disability (IDD). If a person was identified as having IDD, the bill would have limited the use of restrictive housing (solitary confinement) to no more than 15 days in a 30 day period. **This bill did not pass.**

Research shows that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are more likely to be in jails and prisons than people without disabilities. They can also be harmed more easily by restrictive housing (solitary confinement). Even being placed in solitary confinement for a short time can cause serious and lasting harm for people with disabilities.

HB 1154/SB 908: Correctional Services - Restrictive Housing

This bill would have reformed the use of restrictive housing (solitary confinement) in Maryland correctional facilities. It would have updated the definition of restrictive housing, set limits on how long someone can be placed in these units, required that the units operate in the least restrictive way possible, and prohibited placing certain “vulnerable” people, including people with IDD, in restrictive housing. **This bill did not pass.**

The Council supports policies and practices that help jails and prisons better support people with disabilities. Screening for disabilities and limiting the use of restrictive housing would help correctional facilities better identify people with disabilities and respond to their needs. Reforms to restrictive housing policies can help reduce the risk of harm and promote safer, more appropriate treatment for people with disabilities in jails and prisons.

Voting

Voting is a fundamental right. All Marylanders must have the same access to their fundamental right to vote, including people with disabilities. The Council supported these bills that would make voting easier and more accessible for people with disabilities:

HB 44/SB 29: Election Law - Petitions and Ballot Questions - Contents, Plain Language Requirement, and Procedures

This bill changes how petitions for new ballot questions and ballot questions are written. It requires that they are written in plain language so voters can easily understand them. The bill also requires a short summary explaining the practical outcome of the question and a clear statement describing what each voting choice means. To make ballot questions easier to understand, the bill prohibits the use of legal jargon, passive voice, and double negatives. Plain language means writing information so people can understand it the first time they read it. Using plain language helps make voting materials more accessible for everyone, including people with disabilities. **This bill passed.**



The Council supports bills that make voting more accessible for everyone, including people with disabilities.

Since 2024, the Council has worked with the State to implement the Governor's Plain Language Executive Order. Together, we developed Maryland's Plain Language Standards, along with training, resources, tools, and pilot projects to increase the use of plain language across state government. Because of these ongoing efforts, the Council supported this bill.

HB263/SB 100: Election Law - Early Voting Centers - Bus Stops

This bill requires buses on local routes to stop at early voting centers that are within a half mile of the bus route. This makes voting more accessible for everyone. **This bill passed.**

SB 73: Election Law - Polling Place Procedures - Voting by Elderly Voters and Voters with Disabilities (Accessible and Expedited Voting Act of Maryland)

This bill would have required the State Board of Elections to create guidelines to help older voters and voters with disabilities vote more quickly and easily. The guidelines would have included faster lines for voters with disabilities, clear signs showing where to go, priority seating in waiting areas, and training for election judges on how to assist voters with disabilities. **This bill did not pass.**

The Council opposed the following bills that would make voting harder for people with disabilities:

HB 462/SB 567: Elections - In-Person Voting - Proof of Identity

This bill would have required voters to show a photo ID in order to vote in person. If a voter did not have a photo ID, they would have had to show another form of identification along with a document that includes their name and address. Many people with disabilities do not have a government-issued photo ID, so this requirement could make it harder for them to vote. **This bill did not pass.**

HB 830: Election Law - Absentee Ballots - Signature Requirements and Verification

This bill would have required voters to sign their mail-in ballot and have a witness verify the signature. These requirements could make voting more difficult for some people with disabilities. For example, some people with disabilities do not have a consistent or easily readable signature, and finding a witness adds another step to the voting process. **This bill did not pass.**

LEARN

The Council supports practices and policies to improve child care and education so all children and youth play and learn together with the services and supports they need to succeed.

HB 102: Education - Dependent Children of Active Service Members - Advance Enrollment Procedures

This bill requires school districts to allow active-duty service members who are moving from another state to register their children for school before they arrive. The registration process includes a way for families to indicate if their child has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a 504 plan. If a child has an IEP or 504 plan in the state they are moving from, the school district must work with the family and the child's previous school to make sure the child receives appropriate services without unnecessary delays after enrolling. **This bill passed.**



The Council supports legislation that helps students with and without disabilities learn together.

HB 311/SB 507: Public Schools - Individuals with Disabilities - Accessibility and Emergency Planning

This bill requires each local school system to identify accessibility issues for people with disabilities. ***This bill passed.***

HB 649: Advancing Equal Educational Opportunities for All Students in Maryland

This bill would have allowed the Commission on Civil Rights to investigate and take action against discrimination and retaliation in schools. The protections apply to discrimination based on race, religion, sex, disability, and other characteristics. The bill would have also allowed people to file a lawsuit against a school if they experienced this type of discrimination. ***This bill did not pass.***

HB 849: Child Care Scholarship Program - Exceptions and Waitlist for the Freeze in Enrollments

This bill specifies groups of children and families that cannot be put on the waitlist for the Child Care Scholarship (CCS) Program. It also specifies an order of priority for children and families to get off the waitlist. ***This bill passed.***

HB 1321: Child Care Scholarship Program - Application Process and Copays - Alterations

This bill requires Maryland State Department of Education to identify scholarship applicants who qualify for publicly funded pre-K, Head Start, or Early Head Start, inform them of available slots, and assist with enrollment. This help must continue as long as there is a waitlist for the CCS Program. It also creates a structure of required co-payments from families. ***This bill passed.***

The Council supports the Child Care Scholarship Program because it helps families afford child care and supports the inclusion of children with disabilities. The program provides financial assistance to eligible families, with priority given to families of children with disabilities. Together, these two bills make big changes to the way the program works.

PLAY

Maryland needs more playgrounds where all children and their families can learn and play together. Playgrounds are important spaces for children to develop social skills, try new things, and build independence. However, many Marylanders with disabilities cannot fully access playgrounds across the state. In 2023, the Council partnered with MDOD to release the ***Framework and Toolkit for Inclusive Playgrounds in Maryland.***

This framework details all of the benefits of playgrounds where everyone feels welcome and includes a toolkit for how to expand those playgrounds in communities across Maryland.

We expanded on the work and launched the [Playgrounds for All website](#) last year. In addition to the framework and toolkit, it has a map of where to find playgrounds in Maryland with features that include everyone. While Maryland has some inclusive playgrounds, many communities—especially in rural areas—still do not have them. The Council is excited to work with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to address that in Somerset County. This funding helps create a new playground where everyone feels welcome.

Janes Island State Park - Capital Budget Funding

The Capital Budget included \$500,000 for the Council to work with DNR to build an inclusive playground at Janes Island State Park in Somerset County.

Using the Playgrounds for All Toolkit, the Council will provide guidance, training, and technical assistance to Maryland State Parks and DNR's Engineering and Construction Unit during the planning and design process. This pilot project will serve as a model for future inclusive playgrounds in state parks across Maryland.



Maryland needs more playgrounds where all children and their families can play together.

By the Numbers

The Maryland General Assembly **reviewed 2,654 bills** during this session. **884** of the bills **passed**.

The Council **took action** on **77 bills**.

The Council **watched, but did not take action** on another **57 bills**.



Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

CREATING CHANGE • IMPROVING LIVES

410-767-3670 | info@md-council.org

www.md-council.org

This project is supported by the Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$1,262,422 with 100% funding by ACL/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACL/HHS, or the U.S. Government.