



# TOGETHER

MARYLAND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL

LIVE, LEARN, WORK, AND PLAY  2025 HIGHLIGHTS

## OUR MISSION

We create change to make it possible for people with developmental disabilities to live the lives they want with the support they need.

## OUR VISION

People with and without disabilities in Maryland live, learn, work, and play together.

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## DEAR FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES,

2025 was a hard year for the Council. In January, we suddenly lost Council Vice Chair Meghan Jones. Meghan was a strong and dedicated advocate for all Marylanders with disabilities. Her memory led the Council's work for the rest of the year. We honored her by continuing our work to create change so people with developmental disabilities live the lives they want with the support they need.

The Council is proud of the progress we are making to improve the lives of Marylanders with developmental disabilities. This year was the fourth year of our 5-Year State Plan. The State Plan is the roadmap we follow to get where we want to be.

### **Our goals are:**

- People with developmental disabilities are leaders and advocates.
- People with developmental disabilities and their families are empowered to live the lives they want.
- People with developmental disabilities and their families have access to their communities and services and supports. They are treated with dignity and respect.

These goals guide us as we work with people with developmental disabilities, their family members, and other people and organizations across Maryland.

### **In 2025, the Council:**

- Provided information and resources about important issues to **27,626** people.
- Supported projects that impacted **12,434** people.
- Improved lives by changing **39** laws, policies, and programs.

The Council empowered advocates and collaborated with state leaders to restore funding for important DD services. We created a website about playgrounds in Maryland where everyone can play together. We highlighted Marylanders with developmental disabilities who live and thrive in their own homes. We partnered to promote students with and without disabilities learning alongside each other. We continued to support Partners in Policymaking, People on the Go Maryland, and the Youth Leadership Forum to empower more people with disabilities to be leaders and advocates.

2026 is the last year of our current State Plan. We will build on the important work we've done over the last four years. We will continue to empower people to be leaders and advocates, support families, advise policymakers, provide important resources, and create opportunities for Marylanders. We will continue to lead the way so people with and without disabilities can live, learn, work, and play together.

Sincerely,



*Dee Sapp*  
**Dee Sapp**  
Chairperson



*Rachel London*  
**Rachel London**  
Executive Director



## HOW WE CREATE CHANGE

**WE LEAD:** We take bold steps to improve the lives of people with developmental disabilities. We help lead the way with new ideas.

**WE PARTNER:** We bring together people with developmental disabilities, their family members, organizations, and others. Together we find solutions to problems and take action to bring about change.

**WE ADVISE:** We are a trusted advisor to leaders in state government and the state legislature. We work with them to improve laws, policies, programs, and services.

**WE ADVOCATE:** We advocate for people with developmental disabilities to have the same opportunities in life that other members of the community have. We advocate for people to be included and supported so they are successful.

**WE INFORM:** We provide information and resources so people with disabilities and their family members can understand their rights, increase their independence, and find the services and supports they need.

**WE EMPOWER:** We fund advocacy and leadership training. People with developmental disabilities and their family members learn how to effectively advocate for themselves and others.

**WE EDUCATE:** We help teachers, employers, and other community members understand developmental disabilities. Our goal is for them to welcome and include people with disabilities.

**WE FIND SOLUTIONS:** We are the leading organization in Maryland that funds grants focused on developmental disabilities. Grantees develop and test new ideas. We use what we learn to bring about change throughout Maryland.



*“Instead of cuts, we need investments. When we support people with disabilities, we strengthen families, we strengthen communities.”*

**MEEKA CALDWELL, COUNCIL MEMBER**

## WE LEAD

### **Advocating in Annapolis**

During the 2025 legislative session, the Council worked tirelessly to oppose more than \$400 million in proposed budget cuts to disability services. These cuts would have impacted the supports that thousands of Marylanders with disabilities need to live, learn, work, and play in their communities.

Together with our Developmental Disabilities Coalition partners, we sprung into action. We collaborated with legislative leaders and the Governor’s office to address the cuts. We empowered advocates to be involved in the legislative process. We offered solutions to find a way forward.

The work of the Council, the DD Coalition, and the entire community, resulted in budget leaders in the General Assembly and the Governor restoring most of the cuts.

*“This shows what’s possible when people with disabilities, families, and advocates speak up together. I’m proud the Council stood with our community to protect the services that help Marylanders with disabilities live, work, and be part of their communities.”* **RACHEL LONDON, COUNCIL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

# WE PARTNER

## Leading to Learn

The Council funded Loyola University to create a 3-year training program for correctional supervisors in the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services. People with disabilities helped lead the training as teachers and speakers. The program, called Leading to Learn, helps supervisors learn how to better work with and support people with developmental disabilities in the correctional system. In 2025, 157 correctional officers took part in the training. They learned new information and skills to help them better support people with developmental disabilities.



**99%**

of the participants said they were satisfied with the training.

**98%**

said the training had a positive impact on people with disabilities.

## Military Family Listening Sessions

The Council and Department of Veterans and Military Families held 6 listening sessions for military-connected families of people with developmental disabilities. Families shared their experiences and the unique challenges they face, including having to move on short notice because of military orders. The Council will use what we learned to develop a military family toolkit in 2026. The toolkit will help families find and use resources in Maryland.

# WE EDUCATE

## **Inclusive Teacher Training**

Early childhood educators want and need training to help all children—both with and without disabilities—learn, play, and grow together.

The Council funded the Inclusive Teacher Development project through Abilities Network’s Project ACT’s. Through this program, 59 child care teachers received training, joined a community of practice, and got one-on-one coaching. Participants said felt the program was a success. One teacher shared her experience working with twins, including one child with a disability. With support from the program, she helped both children become more engaged and supportive of each other. As a result, they began playing with other children in the class.

## **Together We’re Better**

The Council worked with The Arc Maryland, Maryland Department of Disabilities, and the Maryland State Department of Education on Together We’re Better (TWB). TWB is a statewide program that teaches students why it is important that children and young adults with and without disabilities learn together.



Throughout the year, TWB held 15 events across Maryland. Many of these were school assemblies that helped students understand the value of people with and without disabilities learning together. TWB also shared information at resource fairs and an event at the University of Maryland St. Joseph’s Medical Center. TWB reached more than 1,400 people, most of whom were students.

# WE INFORM

## Playgrounds for All

The Council and the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD) partnered to create and launch our Playgrounds for All website. The site highlights the importance of playgrounds where people with and without disabilities play together. It expands on the Framework and Toolkit for Inclusive Playgrounds that we released in 2023.



The website has resources to help communities create playgrounds that welcome everyone. An interactive map shows public playgrounds in Maryland where people with and without disabilities can meaningfully play together. The website attracted strong interest, with more than 5,000 visitors the first month after launch.

To build the map, Council staff visited nearly 200 playgrounds across Maryland. We also hosted a photoshoot to show the benefits of children with and without disabilities playing together. These photos are included on the website. Council staff talked about this work with community members and professionals in several presentations. They explained why it's important to have playgrounds that everyone can use.



## ***Where is Home?***

The Council released *Where is Home?* The publication features 10 stories of people with developmental disabilities who live and thrive in their own homes. Each story shows that home can look different for everyone. Some stay in the home they have always known. Others build a network of friends in their new neighborhoods. Many find independence and comfort in their own space.

*“I wanted to be home, with support people that would listen to me and hear what I needed, not just what suited them.”* **LINDA**, WHO STAYED IN HER CHILDHOOD HOME AFTER HER MOTHER PASSED AWAY.



*“We wanted our own support staff instead of family.”*

**THEA, WHO LIVES WITH HER HUSBAND. THEY BOTH HAVE DISABILITIES AND ARE THRIVING IN THEIR OWN HOME.**

## **Information and Resources**

The Council worked to help more people find and use information, resources, and events. We made materials easier to understand by using plain language and offering them in different languages.

We shared clear, easy-to-use resources, including:

- DD Day fact sheets about priority issues
- Public Policy Priorities
- Legislative Overview
- 2024 Annual Report
- Maryland General Assembly Senate and House Guidelines
- *Where is Home?* publication
- Playgrounds for All website

We also worked to improve language access for Marylanders. For example, we:

- Shared 70 *Planning Now* Guides in Spanish
- Provided Spanish and ASL interpreters for DD Day at the Legislature and translated fact sheets into Spanish

These efforts helped more Marylanders access important information and take part in advocacy and events.

**25,834**

**Marylanders got information** about important topics.

**4,394**

**resources** were downloaded from our website.

# WE EMPOWER

## Maryland Youth Leadership Forum

The Council funded the Maryland Youth Leadership Forum (YLF), hosted by Independence Now. The program brings together students with disabilities from across Maryland to build leadership and advocacy skills. During the program, students learned about disability rights, leadership, and how to speak up for themselves and others.

In 2025, 25 students from across Maryland participated in YLF. After the program, 76% of participants said they increased their advocacy skills.

*“I like how people with different disabilities were able to gather together in one place to learn how we can live in the future and not let our disability get in our way.”* 2025 YLF PARTICIPANT



## People On The Go Maryland



The Council supports People on the Go Maryland (POG). POG is the only state-wide self-advocacy group led by people with developmental disabilities. POG continued its important work to help people increase their knowledge and skills. They led trainings to help people learn new skills. They also brought people together, including people with developmental disabilities, professionals, community members, and policymakers. This helped people work together to create change and improve lives.

Last year, 427 people with disabilities took part in POG activities. Every person (100%) said they were happy they participated. Together, we are helping people with developmental disabilities become leaders and advocates.

## Supported Decision-Making

Supported decision-making (SDM) allows adults with disabilities to get help from other people to make choices for themselves. The Council funded Parents' Place of Maryland (PPMD) to develop resources and educate people with developmental disabilities and their families about SDM.

PPMD completed this work in 2025. They trained 68 families and professionals about SDM and created 18 fact sheets. They also developed 2 YouTube videos. The videos and other resources are available in both English and Spanish.





## Partners In Policymaking®

The Council worked with The Arc Maryland and People on the Go Maryland to teach people with developmental disabilities and family members to be strong advocates. We did this through Partners in Policymaking® (Partners). Partners is a leadership program that helps prepare people to advocate for what they need in their own lives. It also prepares them to be leaders that bring about change that helps others.



**32** people finished the Partners in Policymaking program in 2025.

This included:

**15** people with developmental disabilities

**17** family members

**100%** of participants said they became stronger advocates.

**85%** of graduates are now taking part in advocacy activities.



# WE ADVISE, WE ADVOCATE, AND WE FIND SOLUTIONS

**The Council created change!** We advised leaders in the state government and legislature. We advocated for people with developmental disabilities so they have the same opportunities as others in the community. We helped people across Maryland better understand developmental disabilities. Our work helped people live safe, healthy, and connected lives in their communities.



**27,626** people got information and resources from the Council



**12,434** people participated in Council projects



**4,731** people used the Playgrounds for All website to find playgrounds where everyone feels welcome



**188** legislators learned about issues affecting people with developmental disabilities



**39** laws, programs, and policies created or improved



**33** committees and councils served on



**Through this work, more Marylanders with and without disabilities live, learn, work, and play together.**

## MARYLAND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL MEMBERS

**Dee Sapp**

Chairperson  
*Charles County*

**Richard Bauernschub**

Vice Chairperson  
*Howard County*

**Damon Briggs**

Vice Chairperson  
*Montgomery County*

**Kevin Armstrong**

*Maryland Works*

**Angie Auldridge**

*Washington County*

**Jody Boone**

*Division of Rehabilitation Services, Maryland State Department of Education*

**Carmen Brown**

*Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services, Maryland State Department of Education*

**Kalani Brown**

*Montgomery County*

**Meeka Caldwell**

*Prince George's County*

**Lucy Caltagirone**

*Disability Rights Maryland*

**Laura-Sun Cefaratti**

*Anne Arundel County*

**Laura Paloma Chavez**

*Office of Long-Term Services and Supports, Maryland Department of Health*



**Amanda Distefano**

*Maryland Department of Aging*

**Staci Forrest**

*Baltimore County*

**Kay Han**

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**Kathy Hargett**

*Montgomery County*

**Marlana Hutchinson**

*Developmental Disabilities Administration, Maryland Department of Health*

**Jarred Jones**

*Baltimore County*

**Karena Jones**

*Wicomico County*

**Tiffany Joseph**

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*Calvert County*

**Kimberly McKay**

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**Justin Stocker**

*Anne Arundel County*

**Katelyn Szymanski**

*Itineris Baltimore*

**Maureen van Stone**

*Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities*

**Lauren Whiteman**

*Office of Children and Youth with Specific Health Care Needs, Maryland Department of Health*

**Marcus Whitman**

*Anne Arundel County*



## TRIBUTE TO MEGHAN JONES

The Council works to create change and improve lives for people with developmental disabilities. Meghan Jones, our vice chairperson for 3 years, was a big part of this work. She was a strong advocate not only for herself, but for all Marylanders with disabilities. She passed away in early 2025. We deeply feel the loss of an incredible advocate, leader, and person.



Governor Wes Moore acknowledged Meghan during an executive order signing. He said: "When the story of this state is written, Meghan's name will be in lights." We couldn't agree more.

We will always remember Meghan's laughter, kindness, leadership, and dedication to advocacy. We honor her by continuing this work and creating change.

# INVESTMENTS



- **Community Supports:**  
\$293,094
- **Advocacy and Leadership Development:**  
\$227,681
- **Information and Resources:**  
\$39,868
- **Education and Training:**  
\$264,168

## WHAT WE'RE DOING IN 2026

### **ENHANCING SELF-ADVOCACY AND PUBLIC POLICY WORK**

**People On The Go Maryland** Support People on the Go to train, help, and support people with developmental disabilities and local self-advocacy groups to learn about issues, build skills, speak for themselves, and be strong advocates.

**PARTNERS IN POLICYMAKING® The Arc Maryland** Train more people with developmental disabilities and family members to be advocates and leaders.

**SMALL GRANTS** The Council began funding small grants again to support projects and trainings and to advance the priorities in our State Plan. These grants will help people with developmental disabilities, their families, and the professionals who support them.

**2027-2031 STATE PLAN** Throughout 2025, Council members and staff prepared for the launch of the next 5-Year State Plan. Staff developed issue briefs to support discussions with Council work teams. From these discussions, the Council set priority focus areas.

These priorities will guide goals, activities, staff work, and resources over the next five years. The new State Plan starts in October 2026.

## COUNCIL STAFF

**Rachel London**  
*Executive Director*

**Jenn Raulin**  
*Deputy Director*

**Stephanie Dolamore**  
*Past Deputy Director*

**Chris Rogers**  
*Director of Engagement*

**Christy Russell**  
*Director of Finance*

**Shawan Pearson**  
*Administrative Coordinator*



## CONNECT WITH US

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