

Governor's Office of Disability Affairs

Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council Report

March 31, 2016

New Administration

Governor John Bel Edwards took office on January 11, 2016. The Governor's Office of Disability Affairs (GODA) is within the Governor's Office of Programs and Planning, formerly Office of Community Programs. Johnny Anderson is Deputy Chief of Staff for Programs and Planning. Bruce Parker is the Coordinator of Programs and Planning. Bambi Polotzola is the Executive Director of GODA. Jamar Ennis is the Assistant Director of GODA and Jolan Jolivette is Program Coordinator.

Stakeholder Briefing

On February 25, 2016, the Governor's Office hosted over 150 child welfare and disability advocates in a coordinated planning meeting in the Governor's Press Conference Room. First Lady Donna Edwards, Chief of Staff Ben Nevers, and Deputy Chief of Staff for Programs and Planning Johnny Anderson encouraged individuals in attendance to continue their extraordinary advocacy efforts to advance the welfare of children and persons with disabilities. The guests in attendance participated by interacting with the cabinet secretaries from the Louisiana Workforce Commission, Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities, Department of Children and Family Services, and members of the Governor's Office staff.

Ms. Wheelchair Pageant

On March 18, 2016, Ms. Wheelchair America and Ms. Wheelchair Louisiana 2015 visited with Gov. Edwards and First Lady Donna Edwards at the Governor's Mansion. The First Family was honored to host them. On March 20, Jamar Ennis, Assistant Director of GODA, served as judge for the Ms. Wheelchair Louisiana 2016 pageant.

Cajun Classic Wheelchair Tennis Tournament

GODA participated in the 2016 Cajun Classic Wheelchair Tennis Tournament. This tournament affords athletes around the world an opportunity to compete and evoke disability awareness and inclusion. This tournament featured the top ranked wheelchair tennis players from 21 countries and 24 states, including Louisiana. GODA presented a certificate of recognition to the organizers and volunteers of this program.

Governor's Advisory Council on Disability Affairs (GACDA)

The executive order and appointments to GACDA are forthcoming. In the interim, potential GACDA appointees met on March 8, 2016. During the meeting, we discussed current GODA programs and future goals and objectives in the area of employment, education, and accessibility. Future meetings are tentatively scheduled for June 21, September 20, and December 6.

Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)

The new director of SILC is Jessica Lewis. SILC has met several times this year to finalize the State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL). SILC represented Louisiana at the "SILC Congress 2016" in Phoenix, Arizona to discuss the various issues and opportunities in independent living. SILC currently seeks dedicated and passionate individuals in the disability community to serve on its council, particularly individuals with disabilities and representatives of private businesses that employ people with disabilities.

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Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Roundtable Discussion

GODA will host a roundtable discussion to discuss various topics relative to the ADA on May 23, 2016 at 1201 North 3rd Street. The morning session will take place from 10:00am to 12:00pm and the afternoon session will take place from 1:00pm to 3:00pm. Each session will feature an ADA expert who will discuss various topics, including how to identify areas of noncompliance with the federal civil rights law, and how to avoid violations of the ADA. Participants are encouraged to raise questions and concerns during this roundtable discussion. Only three people per agency can attend due to limited seating. To reserve seating or for more information, please call (225) 219-9866.

Accessibility

GODA provided an ASL interpreter for the State of the State Address as well as recent press conferences of the governor. The communication department of the Governor's office plans to continue to utilize an ASL interpreter for press conferences.

GODA has worked with the DD Council and the Advocacy Center in communicating with facility planning and control at the Capitol regarding wheelchair accessibility to the front of the Capitol steps.

2016 Inclusive Art Show Contest

To bring greater awareness of the importance of inclusion in today's society, the Governor's Office of Disability Affairs (GODA) is sponsoring the 2016 Inclusive Art Contest. GODA will accept entries that illustrate or describe ideas related to this year's theme and accompanying definitions of inclusion of persons with disabilities. This year's theme is "Inclusion Matters: A Better World For All." Award medals and special recognition from Governor John Bel Edwards will be presented to the artists who submit winning artwork. The Inclusive Art Contest is open to all residents of Louisiana.

Contestants are encouraged to use art as a means to share their vision, experiences, and talents to demonstrate this year's theme. Winning entries will be publicly displayed. All entries must be submitted by May 17, 2016 to 1201 North 3rd Street, Suite 219-G, Baton Rouge, LA 70802.

Lecture Series

The Governor's Office of Community Programs is in the initial planning phase of a Lecture Series. Tentative plans are to host lectures monthly on various topics with invited guest. Lectures will be live streamed from and archived on the Governor's website.

Communications

The Governor's Office has made a concerted effort to communicate with the public through various mediums. Particularly the Governor's Office social media (facebook and twitter) has been utilized to support and promote issues relative to people with disabilities. The Executive Director of GODA, Bambi Polotzola, took over the Governor's twitter all day on February 24 and tweeted about issues important for people with disabilities. All of the Governor's press conferences are open to the public, streamed live on-line, and archived on the website, www.gov.la.gov. Also, all of the Governor's press releases are archived on the website.