



## **Disability Rights Louisiana Report to the Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council for**

**April 2026**

### **PROGRAM UPDATES**

#### **CAP**

DRLA's Client Assistance Program (CAP) helps people with disabilities who are receiving or applying for services from Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS) and American Indian Rehabilitation Services (AIRS) to understand all their benefits and rights under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. CAP may assist consumers and applicants in pursuing legal, administrative or other appropriate avenues to protect their rights. The Client Assistance Program (CAP) is currently serving 37 clients. Jeannie is currently touring the state visiting all the regional offices to "put a face" to the CAP program as well as meet the counselors and LRS support staff. In addition, CAP, as a representative to DRLA, Bayou Land Families Helping Families, the Statewide ILC and LDH Employment First Initiative are all coordinating the second Empowerment Through Employment Conference. It is scheduled for Tuesday, July 28th from 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM. Be on the lookout for a save the date announcement soon.

#### **CLOP**

In DRLA's Community Living Ombudsmen Program (CLOP), trained advocates, who are known as ombudsmen, advocate for the people with developmental disabilities who live in state-licensed, privately-run group homes (ICFs/DD) across the state, in order to ensure their rights are protected and they are free from abuse or neglect. Currently there are 473 publicly funded, privately run ICF/DD facilities housing 3,871 individuals with developmental disabilities across the state. In January and February of the 2026 grant year, CLOP Ombudsmen made 282



visits to these facilities receiving 160 requests for assistance, and they took action on all of the 160 requests. As a result of these actions, ICF/DD residents had involuntary discharges prevented; got opportunities to visit with family; received appropriate medical care; received updates on their Waiver status; received information on their rights; received improved personal care; and received improvements to the physical environment. Further actions by Ombudsman Shirley Brown resulted in the provisional loss of a ICF's license and the arrest of a staff member fired for assaulting a resident.

### **SILAP**

DRLA's Supported Independent Living Advocacy Program (SILAP) serves individuals with developmental disabilities who are receiving OCDD waiver services and supports in order to live in their homes in the community. SILAP provides free services to persons residing in supported independent living environments in the State of Louisiana Human Services Districts I, II, and X, which encompass the greater New Orleans and Baton Rouge areas. Since January 2026, SILAP program has assisted 24 people with obtaining and maintaining appropriate and necessary supports so that they can remain in the community on their waivers. SILAP advocates assisted clients in switching Support Coordination agencies, obtaining a new service provider, securing housing, relocating to a better living environment, and connecting with their families. In one instance, SILAP assisted a client to relocate to a new apartment after having a bedbug issues. The new apartment was not fully accessible for him, specifically the bathroom. SILAP assisted the client and his support team to obtain landlord approval, funding and a contractor to modify his bathroom. The contractor has been hired, and the full modification should be complete in the next few weeks.



## **FAIR**

DRLA's Financial Access Inclusion and Resources program (FAIR) provides financial coaching and case management services to assist formerly incarcerated people with disabilities in overcoming employment and resource barriers, in order to achieve long term financial security. Our services are holistic and are centered around the individual needs of people with disabilities, who may require additional supports and services to successfully reenter their communities after incarceration.

- Over the past year, from March 1, 2025 to February 28, 2026, the FAIR Program helped 99 individuals by providing information and referral services. We also provided intensive financial coaching and case management to 53 active clients. We saw positive results in the 3 key areas that impact our clients long-term economic stability: income growth, debt reduction, and employment:
  - Income growth—55% of our clients increased their income, resulting in a collective gain of nearly \$32,000 per month.
  - Debt reduction—of those who entered with debt, 67% reduced what they owed, with total collective reductions exceeding \$37,000.
  - Employment —55% of clients were employed, and importantly, 83% of those maintained employment for more than 90 days. This level of retention is significant given the barriers our clients face and highlights the effectiveness of the ongoing support we offer.

We achieved these results by focusing on strengthening partnerships, targeted outreach, resource coordination, and increasing program visibility. We continued building relationships with key



partners in housing, workforce, legal, and reentry organizations, and established new connections. We participated in community and outreach events by setting up resource tables to expand our visibility and reach a broader audience. Additionally, we worked closely with frontline service providers to ensure our clients could access the resources they need. Finally, we increased awareness of FAIR services through presentations to courts and clinical settings, to connect more clients with our services earlier in their reentry process.

Lastly, in recognition of Second Chance month, Debbie Weinberg was a speaker and a panelist at an event hosted by the New Orleans Reentry Task Force Legal Subcommittee where she educated employers and HR professionals with information and legal considerations regarding hiring justice-impacted individuals with a disability.

## **BRIEF HIGHLIGHTS OF CURRENT LITIGATION**

### **Chisholm**

The current focus of this case is the receipt of ABA services for children who are on a waitlist for a waiver, and the evaluations required to qualify for ABA services. We have been meeting with LDH on a monthly basis regarding the issues in this case. It is still possible that this case will become active in court again in the next few months as we identify points of non-compliance.

### **AJ v. Gee**

This case addresses children who have been approved to receive specialized nursing services in home, who are not receiving what they are approved for. The settlement agreement was extended to the end of March 2026 and will naturally terminate at that time. We are currently putting together a letter with information for families to inform them what the end of



this case will mean and what their options are if they experience continued or new issues. At the end of this month, we will also be putting information on our website to provide an update.

### **Cooper**

This case addresses the waitlist for people who are sitting in jail to transfer to Eastern Louisiana Mental Health System (“ELMHS”) after a finding of NGBRI or incompetence. We have been monitoring the monthly reporting regarding the waitlist as well as requesting additional documents. We are currently working under provisions from the most recent settlement agreement as well which provided for the creation of a stakeholder group to meet and discuss ways for the State to reduce the waitlist by identifying more inpatient beds and creating more community-based placements. We recently filed a motion to reopen discovery for the limited purpose of taking a deposition of someone at LDH to get concrete answers about how they intend to come into compliance with the settlement agreement. We are awaiting the Court to rule on our motion before we can move forward. In the meantime, we continue to monitor the monthly reporting sent by LDH.

### **Monitoring and Investigations**

In addition to casework, our legal team also conducts regular monitoring of facilities and conducts investigations as necessary. We conduct monthly monitoring visits to the state operated mental health hospital in Jackson, Louisiana: Eastern Louisiana Mental Health System (“ELMHS”). We also conduct monthly monitoring visits to mental health facilities in North Louisiana. Arising from our monitoring, we discovered that juveniles were being taken to Louisiana Behavioral Health in Shreveport for acute care and in some cases were remaining at the hospital well beyond the course of treatment concluded. The children left for extended periods of time were all in DCFS custody and DCFS was unable to identify a placement. While



that is a separate issue, what we were looking at was the failure to provide these children with an education while they sat waiting for months in the hospital. We advocated with the director of LBH and the facility has now hired a teacher to be on staff to provide educational services to any juveniles at the hospital. While it doesn't address the larger issue of children being left in a hospital setting for longer than medically necessary, it does provide those kids access to educational services in the interim.