

Disability Rights Louisiana Report to the Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council for

July 2026

Voting Accessibility

Improving voting accessibility across Louisiana continues to be one of DRLA's top priorities this quarter. During the May 2026 election, our team inspected 39 polling places across nine parishes and identified 12 accessibility-related issues. We expanded those efforts during the June 2026 election by inspecting 69 polling places across 11 parishes, where we identified 21 accessibility concerns.

These inspections continue to make a real difference because we work directly with parish election officials to address barriers as they are identified. In several instances, issues were corrected immediately, including providing accessible entrances at polling places that either lacked an accessible entrance altogether or had significant barriers, such as unsafe ramps that prevented people with mobility disabilities from safely entering the building. These partnerships not only improve access during each election, but also help election officials better understand their accessibility responsibilities and create lasting improvements for future elections.

Policy and Legislative Advocacy

The 2026 Legislative Session was an active one for DRLA, and we continued to work closely with lawmakers, coalition partners, and other stakeholders to improve legislation affecting people with disabilities.

We submitted comments on proposed Louisiana Rehabilitation Services regulations, which resulted in improvements to the final rule while also creating an administrative record that may prove valuable if future legal action becomes necessary.

Working alongside The Arc of Louisiana, the Louisiana Center for Children's Rights, and Loyola Disability Law Clinic, we helped secure amendments to legislation addressing mandatory school expulsions. As a result, the final bill now includes explicit protections for students covered under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).



DRLA also provided direct feedback to the author of legislation that would have broadly prohibited recording conversations without the consent of every party involved. We explained how individuals with disabilities often rely on recording technology as an accommodation for communication, memory, self-advocacy and personal safety. Following those conversations, the legislation was significantly narrowed and ultimately limited to recording eyeglasses rather than all recording methods.

We also testified on legislation that would have expanded the use of the death penalty in ways that could negatively impact individuals with intellectual disabilities. Working alongside The Arc of Louisiana, we educated legislators about the potential consequences of the proposal, and the bill ultimately failed to pass.

In another effort, DRLA worked with the Louisiana Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers to address concerns about legislation intended to protect individuals with disabilities from abuse. Through our advocacy, the Attorney General's Office placed clarifying testimony into the legislative record regarding the bill's intent. That clarification may become an important resource if questions arise about the law in the future.

Community Engagement

DRLA continues to educate communities, professionals, and policymakers on disability issues through presentations and public engagement opportunities. This quarter, the Director of Community Advocacy presented on disability rights and the work of DRLA during the ULM GERO Institute's Ageless Women Leadership Summit, the New Orleans ReEntry Taskforce Legal Committee's Reentry and Employment event, and Partners in Policymaking.

This summer, I will be presenting at the Governor's Office of Disability Affairs Conference on "How to Effectively Tell Your Disability Story to Policymakers." The presentation will focus on helping people with disabilities become stronger advocates by sharing their lived experiences in ways that influence public policy and legislative decision-making.



Community Living Ombudsman Program (CLOP)

The Community Living Ombudsman Program continues to advocate for individuals living in Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities (ICF/DDs). Louisiana currently has 471 publicly funded, privately operated ICF/DD facilities serving approximately 3,857 individuals.

During April and May, CLOP Ombudsmen conducted 281 visits to these facilities and responded to all 62 requests for assistance. Through this work, residents received updates on waiver services, obtained needed medical care, learned more about their rights, and saw improvements made to their living environments. The program successfully met all of its contractual requirements for the fiscal year.

Supported Independent Living Assistance Program (SILAP)

Since March 2026, SILAP has assisted 23 individuals in obtaining and maintaining the supports necessary to remain successfully in their communities. Advocates have helped clients secure new service providers, obtain housing, relocate to safer and more appropriate living environments, reconnect with family members, and navigate complex waiver systems. In one case, SILAP successfully assisted a client in transitioning from the Residential Options Waiver to the New Opportunities Waiver, allowing the individual to receive additional in-home supports while continuing to live independently in the community.

Financial Access Inclusion and Resources (FAIR) Project

The FAIR Project continues to provide case management and financial coaching for individuals with disabilities returning to the community following incarceration. The program has continued expanding community partnerships, including a new collaboration with HANO's Resident Opportunities and Self-Sufficiency Program, which has increased outreach opportunities and community engagement.



Because many FAIR participants rely on Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income, staff recently completed training on upcoming Medicaid policy changes through a partnership with the Southwest Louisiana Area Health Education Center. This training ensures that staff are prepared to help clients maintain access to essential healthcare and financial benefits as new policies are implemented.

One recent case highlights the importance of this work. After a client was hospitalized because of a dental emergency, FAIR staff identified the client's dental insurance coverage through Medicaid, located an in-network provider, secured the earliest available appointment for a fully covered tooth extraction, accompanied the client to the appointment, assisted with paperwork, and ensured that the client received necessary treatment without any out-of-pocket costs.

Client Assistance Program (CAP)

The Client Assistance Program is currently serving 30 individuals, including six Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security clients and three Protection and Advocacy for Assistive Technology clients.

CAP continues to work on both individual and systemic advocacy efforts involving vocational rehabilitation services. Most recently, staff obtained a Director's Exception through Louisiana Rehabilitation Services that allowed a client to participate in an advanced training program in Arkansas.

CAP is also collaborating with Families Helping Families, the Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities, the State Independent Living Council, LSU Human Development Center, and Disability Rights Louisiana to host the virtual Empowerment Through Employment Conference on July 28. The conference will provide individuals with disabilities, service providers, and advocates with practical information and resources designed to promote competitive integrated employment.

Conclusion



Across all of our programs, DRLA continues to focus on creating meaningful opportunities for people with disabilities to live independently, participate fully in their communities, and exercise their rights. Whether we are improving access to the ballot box, advocating for stronger public policy, helping individuals navigate complex service systems, or providing direct advocacy, our work remains centered on removing barriers and ensuring that people with disabilities have equal access to the opportunities and supports they need to thrive.