



We have the legal right of way.

Members of the Ohio General Assembly:

Disability Rights Ohio (DRO) would like to take this opportunity to share information on how COVID-19 is impacting people with disabilities in the state.

"Social distancing." "Isolation." "Self-quarantine." "No visitors." To most of us, these are new terms during the COVID-19 crisis. But for staff and clients at DRO, these terms are familiar to the individuals we serve – Ohioans with disabilities. COVID-19 can be particularly threatening to our population for several reasons. First, many people with disabilities are not fully integrated into their communities and are isolated, not just due to a pandemic, but because of the overall lack of access services such as community-based housing and transportation. Accordingly, many individuals with disabilities live in group facilities, like nursing homes, where COVID-19 is likely to spread more quickly. Finally, many individuals with disabilities of all ages may live with a compromised immune system, putting them at higher risk of contracting or having a more severe case of COVID-19.

This pandemic has demonstrated that systems are not set up for people with disabilities. What seems like "universal" advice - such as diligent and repeated handwashing - is often not so easy for those with physical disabilities because of a continuing lack of accessible bathrooms or sinks in many places. Also, people who are immunocompromised may have to take additional quarantine precautions, especially in work places. There continues to be little recognition that those with disabilities face many societal barriers, daily and during a crisis. The promises made 30 years ago in the American with Disabilities Act are yet to be realized. This is why DRO fights every day to uphold the rights of the ADA - lack of access can mean the difference between illness and health.

In the coming days, weeks, and months, DRO will continue to work with you to address systemic issues to ensure no one is left behind and all rights are upheld. In the meantime, we can offer the following services to you and your constituents:

- **Voter Hotline:** despite the polls being closed today, DRO remains committed to ensuring people with disabilities can exercise their right to vote. Therefore, DRO's Voter Hotline will be taking calls today from 6:30AM to 7:30PM. Call 614-466-7264 or 1-800-282-9181 (toll free in Ohio only).
- **COVID-19 Rights/Services Hotline:** We have created a workgroup to provide research-based information and advice for individuals with disabilities who have had their services or rights compromised, particularly in group settings like nursing homes. This is especially important

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as we have temporarily suspended our normal visits to group facilities. *Call 614-466-7264 or 1-800-282-9181 (Toll free in Ohio only) M-F from 9am-12pm and 1pm-4pm or fill out our [24/7 online intake form](#).*

The safety of our team and the clients we serve comes first. DRO's policies will ensure that our clients receive only the highest standards of care in terms of both service and safety. On a daily basis, DRO will rely on updated guidance from the CDC, the Ohio Department of Health, and Governor DeWine to make informed choices about how to continue the important work we do daily.

For more information or if you wish to discuss these issues further, please contact Lisa Wurm, Director of Policy and Advancement at lwurm@disabilityrightsohio.org Jordan Ballinger at jballinger@disabilityrightsohio.org.

Sincerely,

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