

2019 ANNUAL REPORT



DEAR FRIENDS & SUPPORTERS,

2019 has been a year marked by tremendous transformation and achievement. At the top of the list are two of Disability Rights Ohio's landmark class action lawsuits.

Thousands of Ohio school children with disabilities will be positively impacted by the settlement we reached this past year with the Ohio Department of Education in Doe v. State of Ohio. The plan we created with our partners and the State will improve integration and academic achievement for thousands of Ohio students with disabilities. This is monumental.

A Federal Judge recently approved the final settlement in Ball v. DeWine, DRO's class-action lawsuit filed on behalf of individuals with developmental disabilities who are unnecessarily segregated or at risk of segregation. The agreement we have reached will better inform Ohioans with developmental disabilities about their options for living and working in the community. This fight is at the very core of our existence and we believe the settlement is the big step in restoring freedom of choice for thousands of Ohioans living with disabilities.

As the year drew to a close, DRO prepared for new leadership. I am thrilled to begin my role as Executive Director of Disability Rights Ohio and to partner with all of you. I learned early in life that speaking up and listening are essential to do what's right and get things done. They are also the first steps toward effective advocacy. Our Annual Report is not just filled with statistics, but also stories of how our #AdvocacyMatters and how our efforts impact the lives of Ohioans with disabilities.

Our vision at DRO is to promote a society in which people with disabilities have the opportunity to live their lives to the fullest potential and make their own life choices. We want a society that is free from discrimination, abuse and any barriers that inhibit full participation in all aspects of daily life. To make this vision a reality, I encourage you to speak up when you experience or observe a problem. Let us know so that we can continue to make a difference. I am excited for the opportunities ahead and look forward to working with you to advocate for Ohioans with disabilities. Thank you for your ongoing support of DRO's mission and work.

Kerstin Sjöberg
Executive Director

2019 AT-A-GLANCE #AdvocacyMatters

Every day, Disability Rights Ohio helps people with disabilities:

- Navigate bureaucracy to access the public programs and services they need.
- Ensure Ohio children with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education.
- Fight abuse, neglect, and exploitation in our institutions and communities.
- Challenge stigmas and provide resources necessary to be a self-advocate.

7,372
individual requests
for services

115
investigations &
monitoring activities

88 trainings
provided to 6,173 individuals

108 community outreach events
reaching 6,141 individuals

SPECIAL EDUCATION

The law requires a free and appropriate public education for students with disabilities. When students with disabilities receive anything less, DRO takes action.

Gabe struggled in school but, his school refused to provide additional services. Feeling hopeless, Gabe's mom turned to DRO. #AdvocacyMatters

Second grade was a real struggle for Gabe, and the services his school provided simply weren't enough. Despite his struggles, the school repeatedly denied him services. His mom had tried everything, even placing him in online school. Desperate for help, Gabe's mom turned to Disability Rights Ohio.

A DRO attorney worked to have his school evaluate Gabe more thoroughly. From this, Gabe was shown to have a learning disability, that—with advocacy from DRO's attorney—led to an IEP that meets Gabe's needs. Now in third grade, Gabe is doing much better. He earned all As and Bs and even received student of the month!

DRO's Special Education Team helped:

544 children & families in 2019.

ABUSE & NEGLECT

To keep individuals with disabilities safe in facilities, DRO's Abuse & Neglect Team monitors, investigates, and reports the conditions they live in.

Residents were abused, stolen from, and neglected. We stepped in to make sure they were given the respect they deserved. #AdvocacyMatters

During a facility's routine monitoring visit, residents reported several incidents of abuse: staff were seen throwing water on residents, verbally abusing them, and stealing their personal items. Residents also experienced a number of issues regarding neglect: limited access to necessary medication and equipment, unclean living spaces, limited staffing, and poor-quality food.

After seeing these conditions, Disability Rights Ohio opened an official investigation using access which caused action from a state agency to put the facility on a plan of corrections. The facility hired specialized staff members trained in social work, rehabilitation, and nutrition and removed problem residents. Now, the residents are reporting far better conditions with further improvements such as general tidiness on the way. DRO continues to regularly monitor this facility to ensure that residents are given the quality of care they deserve.

DRO's Abuse & Neglect Team helped individuals, conducted monitoring visits, and opened investigations for a total of:

443 cases & individuals served in 2019.

LITIGATION

When advocacy and mediation aren't enough, DRO advances disability rights through litigation.

Two landmark class action lawsuits moved toward settlement in 2019. For years, DRO has worked closely with the State of Ohio to ensure these settlements improve the lives of Ohioans with disabilities. #AdvocacyMatters

In 2019, Disability Rights Ohio reached a comprehensive settlement in **Doe v. State of Ohio** with the Ohio Department of Education that outlines a plan to improve integration and academic achievement of Ohio students with disabilities. The agreement will enhance the State's support for special education throughout Ohio, as well as ensure measurable improvements in student performance and inclusion for children with disabilities in 11 of Ohio's school districts.

Ball v. DeWine is the class action lawsuit DRO filed against the state on behalf of individuals with developmental disabilities who were unnecessarily segregated or at risk of segregation. A Federal Judge approved the final settlement in March 2020. That settlement expands access to community-based supports for those who want them and will increase class members' access to community-based supports.

VOTING

DRO hosts voter hotline to help Ohioans with disabilities exercise their right to vote. #AdvocacyMatters

For some Ohioans, voting on Election Day can be stressful, difficult, or impossible. Voters with disabilities sometimes experience accessibility barriers or even discrimination based on their disability. Additionally, voters with disabilities may be unsure of their rights, while others may be unsure of the voting process or worried about receiving proper accommodations. To combat these deterrents and advocate for Ohioans' right to vote, Disability Rights Ohio holds a voter hotline on each Election Day that serves as a free resource to Ohio voters with disabilities.

DRO's attorneys and advocates are on call while polls are open to address voting concerns and answer disability-related voting questions. DRO also provides more resources on voting rights through its online **Self-Advocacy Resource Center**.

VICTIMS OF CRIME ADVOCACY

Too often, getting justice for victims of crime with disabilities can be extremely difficult. DRO fights to change that.

Bradon experienced abuse from his caregiver in the development center. DRO fought to bring him justice. #AdvocacyMatters

Disability Rights Ohio investigated and substantiated multiple acts of physical abuse by staff members against Bradon. In addition, DRO found that multiple staff members witnessed the abuse yet failed to report these acts.

To hold them accountable, DRO collaborated with local law enforcement and Bradon's family. Ultimately, the employee pleaded guilty to six counts of patient abuse, leading to a 59-month prison sentence and registration on a sex offender registry, which permanently disqualifies her from working with DO populations. Bradon's mom credits DRO with bringing justice. "Anyone who works with people with disabilities should know that if they report to abuse against those they are supposed to care for, they will be held accountable for their actions."

DRO's Victims of Crime Advocacy helped:

92 people in 2019.

POLICY & COMMUNICATIONS

DRO is involved at the forefront when it comes to policies and issues impacting people with disabilities, providers and their loved ones.

DRO's Policy & Communications teams, track legislative issues that protect and advocate for people with disabilities, both at the Statehouse and Washington, D.C. #AdvocacyMatters

DRO's policy team monitors dozens of pieces of legislation and maintains relationships with lawmakers to educate and inform them about how their proposals will affect people with disabilities. We know that many partners and self-advocates need information on constantly moving and complex legislation. So we maintain a Legislative Resource Center, designed to provide information about the most critical proposals currently making their way through the legislative process. Each page provides a summary, names and links to the bill's sponsors, links to the bill's status and important dates, including any hearings that have been held or are scheduled.

WIPA/BENEFITS OF COUNSELING

Some Social Security Administration beneficiaries receive their disability benefits through work. To help them understand their benefits, DRO's **Work Incentives Planning & Assistance (WIPA)** program guides the way.

They wanted to understand their benefits while transitioning back to work. We helped guide the way. #AdvocacyMatters

Receiving disability benefits through the Social Security Administration can be a needed relief for individuals with disabilities who are transitioning back to work. But when award statements get confusing, Ohioans can count on Disability Rights Ohio to help.

DRO's benefit counselors help beneficiaries understand their benefits, appeal denied benefits, and ensure people with disabilities get the help they need to be financially stable. These counselors provide individual financial counseling, planning, and advice to help SSA beneficiaries feel good about getting back to work.

DRO's WIPA Team helped:

491 people understand their benefits in 2019.

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We have the legal right of way.

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JOIN US IN OUR MISSION

Help **Disability Rights Ohio** continue to positively impact the lives of Ohioans with disabilities through advocacy that matters. As a 501(c)(3) corporation, we rely on contributions from individual donors who want to make a difference in the lives of people with disabilities. With your support, Disability Rights Ohio is able to continue to provide legal rights protection and advocacy services for individuals with disabilities.

