

2018 ANNUAL REPORT



Disability
Rights OHIO

We have the legal right of way.



DEAR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS,

DRO had a pivotal 2018. We rolled out a new protection and advocacy program to investigate financial exploitation of people with disabilities receiving Social Security disability benefits. We also successfully expanded our short-term assistance unit to provide more comprehensive advice and representation to more clients.

This report shows what we did, but it also paints a portrait of what life for Ohioans with disabilities would be if there were no P&A and CAP. Hundreds of people would be denied services without recourse. They wouldn't receive information about how to challenge those decisions. Children in residential treatment would be abused with no watchdog to investigate and prevent those abuses. People in large institutions would not have the promise of living in their own homes in their communities. And the list goes on.

In each of these areas, DRO has made a significant difference in the lives of people with disabilities in Ohio, and we couldn't do it without people like you - our allies and supporters.

As we move on to 2019, know that we are working every day to ensure all Ohioans with disabilities are full and equal members of society. Thank you for your support.

Michael Kirkman

Executive Director

2018 AT A GLANCE

- **6,340** individual requests for services
- **79** trainings provided to **3,209** individuals
- **167** investigations and monitoring activities
- **123** community outreach events reaching **58,906** people

DRO helps people with disabilities navigate overwhelming bureaucracy to access the public programs and services they need. We pry open the doors of opportunity for Ohio children with disabilities to receive a free and appropriate public education. We boldly fight to stop the abuse, neglect and exploitation of individuals with disabilities in institutions and in the community. We challenge stigmas and provide Ohioans with a positive view of individuals with disabilities. We give people with disabilities the tools and resources that they need to be a powerful force in the improvement of their own lives and their communities.

Nothing we do would be possible without our generous donors and supporters. These individuals and organizations have amplified our ability to meet the demands of our clients and serve as many Ohioans with disabilities as possible.



INTAKE & SHORT-TERM ASSISTANCE

He needed an in-person ASL interpreter. We reminded his medical providers of their responsibility. #AdvocacyMatters

Jack was trying to schedule an appointment with a new family doctor. He needed an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter and knew that his doctor was required to provide one, but when he called the doctor's office, he hit some roadblocks. The receptionist told Jack that they would provide video remote interpreting (VRI) instead of an in-person interpreter from an agency Jack knew to be reliable.

Jack was frustrated and knew this arrangement would not work for him. He had run into problems with VRI in the past - it often disconnects, freezes up, lags or the audio feed drops, turning a 15-minute appointment into an hour-long ordeal. He knew he needed a live, trusted interpreter at the appointment with him, so he reached out to DRO for help.

A DRO attorney contacted Jack's medical provider to resolve the situation. After hearing from DRO, the provider sent Jack a list of potential interpreters. He was happy to be able to choose an interpreter from one of his preferred agencies to attend the appointment with him in person.

**DRO'S INTAKE TEAM
HELPED**

2,333
PEOPLE IN FY 2018



↑ Restrooms
↓ Loge Seating
↓ ATM
↓ First Aid
↑ Guest Services
↑ Backstage Café
↓ Courtside Terrace
↓ South Garage
↓ Box Office

SPECIAL EDUCATION



She needed someone to fight for her education. We stepped up. #AdvocacyMatters

A'Ioni Wagner was doing great in a school for kids with behavior disabilities, but her school district no longer wanted to pay for her attendance there. Instead, they sent her to her local middle school, where she struggled with teachers who often resorted to immediately restraining her instead of helping her through practical interventions. In seventh grade, she got expelled twice, missing 117 days of school. Her mom knew that she wasn't getting the free, appropriate public education that was her right, so she called DRO.

DRO attorneys Kristin Hildebrant and Laura Osseck filed two lawsuits on A'Ioni's behalf, and in the process uncovered systemic problems with the school district, which they reported to the Ohio Department of Education (ODE). ODE found multiple violations and put the district on a corrective action plan. Eventually, A'Ioni transferred to a different district that allowed her to once again to go a school that would serve her specific needs. She worked hard to make up the time she had missed, got fantastic scores on her SATs and graduated on time at age 18. She's now planning to continue her education at Cuyahoga Community College.

DRO HELPED

573

**FAMILIES WITH
SPECIAL ED ISSUES
IN FY 2018**



EMPLOYMENT

They discriminated against her at work. We fought to uphold her rights. #AdvocacyMatters

On her first day on the job at a daycare, Theresa Petrullo told a co-worker that she had recently been diagnosed with macular degeneration. The co-worker informed the center director, who terminated her employment at the end of the day. Confused, Theresa asked the center to put the reason in writing. The letter they sent said that she had been fired because of her vision impairment, even though she was still able to drive and used a magnifying glass only to read small print. Suspecting discrimination, Theresa filed a complaint with the Ohio Civil Rights Commission (OCRC) and turned to DRO for help.

Before DRO attorney William Puckett could even speak with the attorney for the daycare, Theresa received yet another letter, this time calling her OCRC complaint extortion and threatening to file litigation if she did not drop it. So Theresa filed a second complaint with OCRC alleging retaliation.

DRO attorneys represented Theresa when the daycare appealed to the court. The judge upheld OCRC's decision that the employer had violated discrimination law and ordered that the daycare award Theresa back pay, reinstate her employment, revise their employee handbook and provide disability training to their employees.

DRO WORKED ON
305
EMPLOYMENT
CASES IN FY 2018



ABUSE & NEGLECT

The clients were living in appalling conditions. We made sure they were safe. #AdvocacyMatters

As the Protection & Advocacy system for people with disabilities in Ohio, Disability Rights Ohio constantly monitors facilities where people with disabilities live to make sure they are clean and safe and the residents are well cared for. This includes places like large state-run centers for individuals with developmental disabilities, state psychiatric hospitals, private skilled nursing facilities and smaller licensed mental health facilities for kids and adults. When DRO uncovers problems at these facilities, we advocate for solutions that protect individuals' rights and safety.

DRO conducted a monitoring visit to a group of facilities for people with mental illness in the Cleveland area. What they found was shocking: unsanitary conditions, broken furniture, bugs, bathroom sinks propped up by scraps of wood, porches caving in and windows with gaping holes. Afterward, they submitted a report with photographic evidence to the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS). A follow-up visit showed that the poor conditions remained unchanged over time, and DRO asked OhioMHAS to begin license revocation proceedings. Ultimately, OhioMHAS announced plans to shut down all of the facility's locations and move all residents to other adult care facilities in the area.

**DRO WORKED ON
204
ABUSE & NEGLECT
CASES IN FY 2018**



PUBLIC REPORTS

When private advocacy doesn't get good outcomes, DRO releases reports to inform the public

When DRO uncovers abuse and mistreatment of people with disabilities in facilities, we report our findings to the appropriate statewide licensing agencies, including the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS), the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities and the Ohio Department of Health. We then follow up continually with the facility and the state agency until the abuses have been addressed - whether that's through suspended admissions, staff changes and trainings, or closure of the facility. Sometimes, however, our private advocacy doesn't lead to the changes that are needed to keep our clients safe. In those rare occasions, we will release a public report detailing the egregious abuses and ongoing systemic issues at the facility.

In fiscal year 2018, DRO took this step for the Ohio Hospital for Psychiatry, a 130-bed, private inpatient psychiatric hospital. The report provided substantiated allegations of abuse and inappropriate care and called on OhioMHAS to take administrative action to prevent future risk of harm. News articles about the report ran in multiple outlets. Ultimately, OhioMHAS suspended admissions at the Ohio Hospital for Psychiatry while the systemic issues were addressed and new training and protocols were established.

DRO CONDUCTED
167
INVESTIGATIONS
AND MONITORING
ACTIVITIES
IN FY 2018



COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

Her nursing services were threatened by a change to her waiver. We helped her maintain the care she needs. #AdvocacyMatters

Thanks to a Medicaid waiver, Mimi had been receiving nursing services to help with her feeding tube, medications and walking assistance for years. When the state decided to eliminate the waiver she'd been on and transition her to a different one, they also notified her that she'd be losing her nursing services. Her father was very concerned that this change put Mimi's health and safety at risk and that she might have to go to an institution to receive services, so he called Disability Rights Ohio to ask for help with challenging the decision.

A DRO attorney provided him information about the Medicaid state hearings and administrative appeals process and advised him through each step. Eventually, Mimi's nursing services were reinstated, and she is now able to receive the care she needs to live safely at home in her community.

DRO WORKED ON
361
COMMUNITY
INTEGRATION
CASES IN FY 2018



LITIGATION

DRO uses litigation strategically to advance the cause of disability rights

Sometimes, advocacy and mediation are not enough to change a situation that is unfair. In those cases, the only remaining course of action is filing a lawsuit or pursuing change through the court system. During the past year, DRO actively participated in 23 legal cases for clients, successfully completing 10 lawsuits. Most notably, DRO resolved *Hindel v.*

Husted, originally filed in 2015, which pushed the Ohio Secretary of State's office to make its voter website accessible and led to the launch of a remote absentee ballot marking tool for voters with vision impairments and other print disabilities.

Our attorneys, paralegals and advocates all work together to manage DRO's ongoing litigation. They tackle individual and systemic problems in many different arenas, including:

- Community integration
- Special education
- Employment
- Voting accessibility
- Abuse and neglect

**DRO HELPED
CLIENTS THROUGH
23
CASES INVOLVING
LITIGATION IN
FY 2018**



VOTING

She called because they wanted to vote. We helped her clear the way. #AdvocacyMatters

The call came in to DRO's voter hotline at about 2:15 p.m. on Primary Election Day, May 8, 2018. A staff person at a psychiatric hospital had four patients who wanted to vote but couldn't go to their polling location because they were hospitalized. DRO had done voting rights trainings at the hospital, so the staff member knew that the patients had the right to vote, and she called us to help her through the process.

DRO staff told her what forms to use to request absentee ballots and let her know that she needed to submit them to the proper boards of elections quickly - before 3 p.m. The hospital staff member successfully faxed and emailed the forms and made sure the boards of elections knew that DRO had advised her. Later, she told us that all four people had received absentee ballots and were able to vote.

DRO EDUCATED

2,613

**PEOPLE ON THEIR
VOTING RIGHTS IN
FY 2018**



VICTIMS OF CRIME ADVOCACY

Right: No one is allowed to lock you out of the building.

DRO's new illustrated children's book helps kids in residential treatment facilities understand their rights

Thanks to a Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grant from the Ohio Attorney General's Office and the U.S. Department of Justice, Disability Rights Ohio released *Be an Advocate: How to Use Your Rights to Tell Your Story*, a new resource created specifically for children living in residential treatment facilities licensed by the Ohio Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services (OhioMHAS). The 44-page full-color illustrated book outlines the rights these children have under Ohio's Administrative Code in easy-to-understand language and provides a step-by-step guide to the state's grievance and appeals process. Consulting Writer Kelly Baas, Illustrator Cailey Tervo and OhioMHAS also partnered on the project.

"One of our advocates saw a real need to make these rights more accessible for children so they can better advocate for themselves in residential care," says Michael Kirkman, Executive Director of Disability Rights Ohio. "As far as we can tell, an illustrated children's book of this kind has not been done before anywhere else in the country. We are proud of this book and hope that the advocacy skills they learn from it will serve these children well for the rest of their lives."

DRO HELPED

107

**VICTIMS OF CRIME
WITH DISABILITIES
IN FY 2018**

A middle-aged woman with dark hair, wearing a red long-sleeved shirt, is seated at a wooden desk. She has a distressed expression, with her right hand pressed against her temple. In her left hand, she holds a blue pen over a stack of papers. A pair of gold-rimmed glasses rests on the desk to her right. The background is a blurred indoor setting with a doorway and a green chair. A pink and red geometric graphic is in the bottom left corner.

BENEFITS COUNSELING

Sheila's confusing government letter was made clear, thanks to a little help from DRO. #AdvocacyMatters

Sheila was concerned. She'd gotten a letter in the mail that seemed to say her Medicare benefits would stop at the end of the year, and she wasn't sure why. She called DRO's Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program, since she'd worked with our benefits counselors before and thought they had been great at answering her questions. Just as she'd hoped, DRO benefits counselor called the Social Security Administration to find out more about Sheila's letter. It turned out the notice in the letter was a standard part of award letters sent to people who receive Social Security Disability benefits. Sheila was so relieved to know that she would not lose the Medicare coverage she depends on.

Sometimes letters from the Social Security Administration can be confusing. DRO's WIPA program can help people better understand their benefits.

**DRO'S WIPA TEAM
HELPED**

561

**PEOPLE
UNDERSTAND THEIR
BENEFITS IN
FY 2018**



POLICY & COMMUNICATIONS

We wanted to help the disability community track important legislation. So we created a new online resource center. #AdvocacyMatters

Part of protecting and advocating for people with disabilities in Ohio is tracking important legislation proposed at the Statehouse and in Washington, D.C. Disability Rights Ohio monitors dozens of pieces of legislation at any given time 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 in 2018, we launched our new online Legislative Resource Center, which provides 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.

DRO TRACKED

225

**PIECES OF
LEGISLATION IN
FY 2018**



REPRESENTATIVE PAYEE

The newest P&A program protects people with rep payees from fraud and exploitation

The Representative Payee program started on August 1, 2018, after the passage of HR 4547, the Strengthening Oversight and Beneficiary Protections Act. With this law, the Protection and Advocacy Agencies across the country, like Disability Rights Ohio, will start performing regular reviews of the Representative Payees within the Social Security Administrations system.

Through this program we will:

- **Assist** representative payees in performing their duties in accordance with the Social Security Administrations guidelines and understanding what their obligations are to the beneficiary.
- **Review** the financial records the representative payee uses to keep track of the beneficiary's Social Security benefits to ensure no issues are present.
- **Speak** with the representative payee and beneficiary about the payeeship, in order to discuss any concerns or issues either or both may have.
- **Make** outside referrals for either or both the representative payee and the beneficiary concerning other issues or needs that may come about through the review.
- **Ensure** any issues found are addressed through direct advocacy for the beneficiary or referral to the appropriate agencies.

**DRO EXPECTS TO
PERFORM**

190

**REP PAYEE REVIEWS
IN FY 2019**

FINANCIAL PICTURE

Disability Rights Ohio receives support from core federal grants that provide the basic foundation for our work as the Protection and Advocacy system. We also strategically partner with federal and state agencies, private foundations and individual donors to build long-term stability and provide additional programs and services that advance our mission.

CORE FEDERAL GRANTS

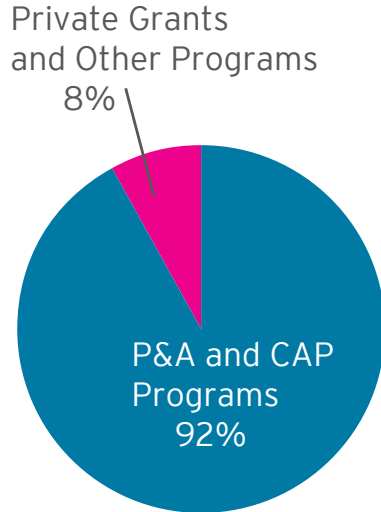
- Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities (**PADD**)
- Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness (**PAIMI**)
- Client Assistance Program (**CAP**)
- Protection and Advocacy for Individual Rights (**PAIR**)
- Protection and Advocacy for Assistive Technology (**PAAT**)

- Protection and Advocacy under the Help America Vote Act (**PAVA**)
- Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Traumatic Brain Injury (**PATBI**)
- Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (**PABSS**)
- Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Program (**WIPA**)
- **NEW!** Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries with Representative Payees (**PABRP**)

OTHER RESOURCES

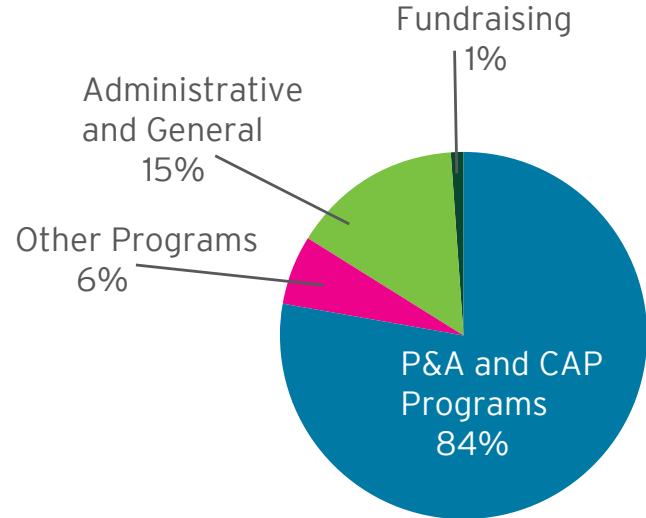
- Housing and Urban Development (**HUD**) Fair Housing Program
- Ingram-White Castle Special Education Fellowship and The Columbus Foundation
- The Ohio State Bar Foundation
- Victims of Crime Assistance Act Fund

REVENUE BY SOURCE 2018



Total Revenue: \$4,721,485

EXPENSES BY CATEGORY 2018



Total Expenses: \$4,602,485

2018 PARTNERS

FEDERAL PARTNERS

- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Education
- Social Security Administration
- Department of Housing and Urban Development

STATE PARTNERS

- The Office of the Ohio Attorney General

PRIVATE FOUNDATION PARTNERS

- Henry E. Coyle Fund of The Columbus Foundation
- The Ingram-White Castle Foundation
- The Impact Fund
- The Ohio State Bar Foundation
- The Bauer Fund of The James Jay Dudley Luce Foundation

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JOIN US IN OUR MISSION

Help Disability Rights Ohio keep the victories coming. 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.





Disability Rights **OHIO**

We have the legal right of way.

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