



GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON  
DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

# Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education

## 2022-23 Annual Update



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# A year in review

## Jena Crafton, Council Chair

2023 was a good year for the Governor’s Council on Disabilities and Special Education (Council or GCDSE) and included many changes. First, former Executive Director Patrick Reinhart who retired in 2019, became our director again. Patrick’s long history with the Council and previous experience proved to be timely and helpful for Council members and our staff. Governor Dunleavy reappointed many members and added several qualified Alaskans, bringing our number to 24 members. See page 19 for list of Council members. After serving as the Vice-Chair of the Council for two years, I became the Chair in July 2023. I personally want to thank former Chair, Heidi Leib-Williams, for her support and guidance she provided to me. Heidi’s leadership was great, and she did so much for the Council. As the new Chair, I brought some ideas of my own that I hope the Council has some success with. For example, there have been a lot of school districts getting in trouble with overuse of restraint and seclusion as a disciplinary tactic. Years ago, when I was a special education student, we had Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PBIS). I want to make sure we get that back in all the schools in the state, so no special education student has to be “restrained” or “secluded”. It is against the law anyway. We may have to remind them of that too. I also want to welcome our new Vice-Chair of the Council, Sabrina Richmond of Juneau. Sabrina loves kids and wants to help too, so she is going to help us lead the way.



Patrick Reinhart  
Executive Director



Jena Crafton  
Council Chair

– Jena Crafton, Chair

## Patrick Reinhart, Executive Director

It feels good to be back at the Council doing the thing I love the best. Advocacy! Advocacy! I too want to thank Heidi, our previous Chair, for her stellar leadership, and new Chair, Jena Crafton. She is always so positive in everything she does so I really look forward to working with her for the next 1.5 years and supporting her in her duties as the Chair. Did you know this is the first time in the history of the Council that a person with an intellectual and developmental disability is the Chair? Bravo Jena! And Sabrina for backing her up as Vice-Chair.

We had a lot of successes this past year and I am so proud of our group because of them. We saw a very important bill we supported become law, SB 57 Adult Host Home Care. Jena was even able to speak at the bill signing in Palmer and introduce Governor

Dunleavy who signed it. We were able to work with our partners to apply for and receive a \$10 million five-year grant to support youth with disabilities on a path toward careers and employment. As an “Employment First” state, I am so excited for the work that is about to unfold across the state because of this large grant.

Also in 2023, we supported some great learning and fun events across the state, such as the Disability Pride Celebrations in Anchorage and Soldotna, the Self-Advocacy Summit put on by Peer Power, the Full Lives Conference put together by the Alaska Training Cooperative, a “town hall” on Alternatives to Guardianship, the Aging and Disability Summit hosted by Special Olympics Alaska, the Inclusive Practice Awards at the Statewide Special Education Conference, and many more. Of course, none of this would be possible if it were not for the awesome board members appointed by the Governor, and a great professional staff to support the many facets of our work. While our staff is small (8 members), they are mighty in their output and dedication to the Council’s mission:

*Creating change that improves the lives of Alaskans with disabilities.*

*Thank you, staff, board members and everyone who supports this mission.*

–Patrick Reinhart, Executive Director

# Creating change that improves the lives of Alaskans with disabilities

## Community Inclusion, Supports, & Services

Individuals with developmental disabilities will have expanded access to a flexible system of meaningful support and services in their homes and communities, aiming to increase the number of people with developmental disabilities living the lives they choose.

## Self-Advocacy & Leadership

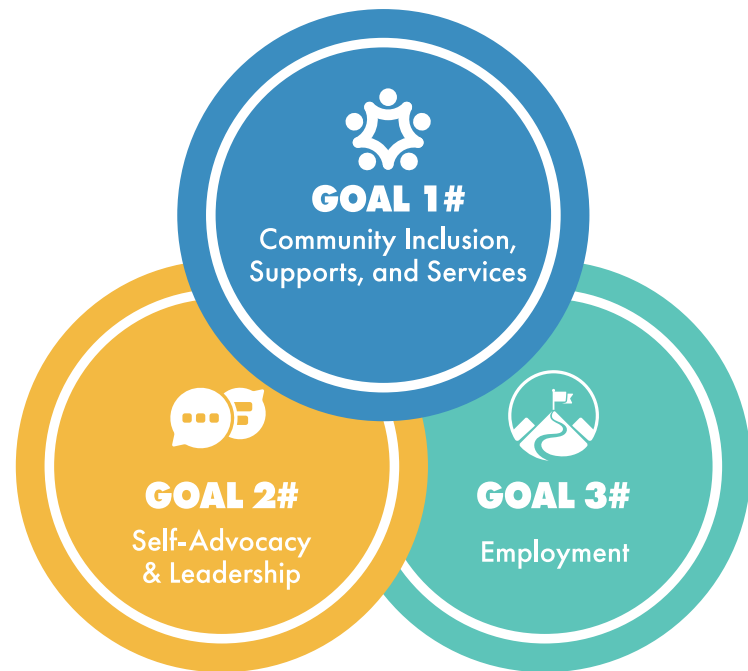
Individuals with developmental disabilities will have increased access to education, tools, and opportunities for self-advocacy. Individuals with developmental disabilities will experience enhanced access to education, tools, and opportunities for self-advocacy throughout their lives, with the goal of increasing the number of people expressing their vision for their lives in local, state, and national forums.

## Employment

Individuals with developmental disabilities will have access to support, services, programs, and training necessary for successful transitions to adulthood, meaningful work experiences, integrated and competitive employment, as well as career development, across their lifespan.

## Developmental Disabilities Shared Vision

*“Alaskans share a vision of a flexible system in which each person directs their own supports, based on their strengths and abilities, toward a meaningful life in their home, their job and their community. Our vision includes supported families, professional staff and services available throughout the state now and into the future.”*



# Council Role

State Interagency  
Coordinating  
Council  
  
IDEA (Part C  
Infants & Toddlers  
with Disabilities)

State Special  
Education  
Advisory Panel  
  
IDEA  
(Part B — Special  
Education)

Governing Board  
of Special  
Education  
Services Agency  
(SESA)

State Council on  
Developmental  
Disabilities  
(DD Act)

Beneficiary  
Advisory Board  
  
Alaska Mental Health  
Trust Authority

## Creating Change that Improves the Lives of Alaskans with disabilities

### Executive Committee

Jena Crafton, Chair  
Sabrina Richmond, Vice Chair  
Patrick Reinhart, Executive Director



### GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

## Committees

(Standing committees conducting daily operations)

Interagency  
Coordinating  
Council (ICC)

Self-Advocacy  
and Leadership

Employment

Community  
Inclusion,  
Supports, and  
Services

Legislative

Special  
Education  
Advisory Panel  
(SEAP)



# Community Inclusion Supports & Services



# Community Inclusion Supports & Services

## Early Intervention and Education



### Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP)

The Council, in its role as the SEAP, advises and assists the Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) to improve special education services for children with disabilities between 3 and 21 years old. The Panel has been monitoring the use of restraint and seclusion in some Alaska school districts and has reviewed and discussed potential regulatory changes regarding supervision of district and professional staff working with children receiving special education services across the state.

### State Interagency Coordinating Council for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities (ICC)

The Council, in its role as the ICC, advises and assists the State Office of the Infant Learning Program (ILP) regarding the arrangement of appropriate Early Interventions Services (EIS) for children with disabilities between birth and 3 years old. In 2023, the ICC began to discuss and research what it would take to lower the eligibility requirements for ILP services. Currently, Alaska is tied with 2 other states with the most stringent eligibility criteria. The goal is to have more children receiving services earlier in life to not only improve their quality of life, but save the state money and resources in the future.



### Special Education Services Agency (SESA)

SESA provides training and technical assistance to school personnel who have students with low-incidence disabilities, especially those in remote or rural regions of Alaska. The Council serves as their governing board. In 2023, SESA served 4,606 unique individuals, all while relocating their main offices in Anchorage. One of the many invaluable services SESA provides is the Anne Freitag lending library that supports all of the programs and grants housed at SESA. The library is home to over 6,000 items ranging from books to adaptive equipment and assistive technology. These items are available to SESA staff, Alaskan school personnel, and anyone in the State of Alaska to help individuals with special needs, or to develop a better understanding of special needs.





# Self Advocacy & Leadership



# Self Advocacy and Leadership



Advocacy on behalf of Alaskans with disabilities and their families is one of the primary responsibilities of the Council. The Council conducts its advocacy efforts on both state and federal levels due to its multiple roles.

**GOAL 2#**  
Self-Advocacy  
& Leadership

The Governor’s Council on Disabilities and Special Education (referred hereto as GCDSE or the Council) serves as Alaska’s Developmental Disabilities Council, a federally required role of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act) which includes a unique responsibility to engage in “advocacy, capacity building, and systemic change activities” without interference by the State (42 USC 15024(c)(5)(L)).

## State Advocacy

Annual meetings with Alaska legislators presented priorities to members of the Governor’s cabinet and Governor’s office.

### The Council’s 2023 Advocacy Priorities

1. Home and Community Based Services Efficiencies
2. Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children’s Bill of Rights
3. Adult Host Home Care
4. Centralized Accommodation Fund

## Legislative Update

In February 2023, Council members, their Direct Support Professionals (DSP), and Council staff met in Juneau for legislative visits for the first time since the pandemic. They met with 57 legislators to present the Council’s four position papers and were invited to a social function at the Governor’s mansion. Council members shared their stories and advocated for their legislative priorities with Governor Mike Dunleavy. Two Council members and the Executive Director also advocated for their priorities before the Senate Health and Social Services Committee.

On July 29, 2023, the Council experienced a legislative victory with the signing of SB 57, the Adult Host Home Care bill, which was supported by the Council through a position paper, and by educating legislators and providing invited testimony during bill hearings. SB 57 comes as a big win for the Council and its partners, but most

importantly for individuals the bill aims to serve: foster youth with developmental disabilities on Medicaid waivers approaching their 18th birthday. When a foster youth turns 18, they are released from custody and often have nowhere to go. This legislation allows a foster parent caring for a youth with a developmental disability to apply for an “Adult Host Home” care license that will keep the youth and foster parent together if that is their mutual preference.

## Self-Advocacy Support

### Peer Power Alaska



The Council continued to support Alaska’s statewide self-advocacy organization for individuals with Intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

Peer Power’s 6th Annual statewide Self-Advocacy Summit took place in person from April 28-30, 2023, in Anchorage. Ninety Alaskans with developmental disabilities and/or their supporters from across the state attended the Summit. This year’s Summit focused on empowering people with disabilities, especially around advocacy related to the need to strengthen the DSP workforce.

For information on the next Self-Advocacy Summit, contact Lanny Mommsen (907) 269-8990 or [lanny.mommsen@alaska.gov](mailto:lanny.mommsen@alaska.gov)

### Disability Pride Celebration

In July 2023, the Council teamed with Peer Power to sponsor the Disability Pride celebration on the Park Strip in downtown Anchorage. About 400 people enjoyed a beautiful day that included many vendor booths, food trucks, free t-shirts, pony rides, and an inspirational talk by Alaska’s Paralympic gold medalist, Andrew Kurka.

### SDMA

GCDSE continued Supported Decision-Making Agreement (SDMA) activities. Among the highlights, the Council provided booklets and flyers at multiple statewide events and hired a contractor to update the SDMA guide and GCDSE webpage. The updated SDMA webpage will contain new content, including video resources, and a more practical, easy to use website design. <https://health.alaska.gov/gcdse/Pages/projects/SDMA/>.



## I Have Rights

Five GCDSE self-advocate council members along with a GCDSE staff member who also has DD's presented the "I Have Rights" panel at Full Lives conference on April 3, 2023. The presentation details individual rights for access, choice, community, dignity & respect, privacy, safety, and work for Alaskans with developmental disabilities. This was the first time advocates have presented the material in person. Previous versions of this presentation took place virtually via Zoom. The Council later presented the "I Have Rights" panel nationally at the NACDD conference in Florida on July 27, 2023.

The "Living Well: I Have Rights" guide is posted to the Council's website <https://health.alaska.gov/gcdse/Pages/Publications/>.

## PSA Abuse and Neglect videos

Through the Administration for Community Living's (ACL) Living Well on the Last Frontier grant, Senior and Disabilities Services (SDS) worked in collaboration with the GCDSE and the Disability Law Center of Alaska (DLC) to develop two Public Service Announcement (PSA) videos regarding abuse and neglect for people with developmental disabilities.

The first PSA is titled "Alaskans with Disabilities Deserve Respect" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CWFFivn3dts>)

The second is titled "Alaskans with Disabilities Have Rights" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gNYTpVqwhc>).

Participants in the PSA video include a range of individuals with developmental disabilities ranging from cerebral palsy, IDD, vision impairment, hearing aid users, ADHD, FASD, and others.



# Employment



# Employment

## Employer Engagement Efforts



The Council continued to participate in the Business Employment Services Team (BEST) which is a collaborative effort between the Departments of Health and Labor and Workforce Development. The team's mission is to meet the workforce needs of Alaskan businesses and improve hiring outcomes for individuals with disabilities and veterans.

The BEST Team held a Job Fair and Employment Symposium in October 2023. The event included over 24 employers and agencies and had 14 total presentations regarding employment incentives and programs for both employers and job applicants. Sharon Miranda from Hope Community Resources was awarded the 'Lifetime Achievement Award' recognizing her many years of influential service to the disability community.

## Indigenous Transitions Pilot Project

The Alaska Indigenous Transition Skills Curriculum fills a much-needed gap in Alaska's rural/remote economic system. The curriculum focuses on teens and young adults with I/DD who live in rural/remote Alaska. The curriculum helps students continue to live in their home communities, if desired, by providing a cultural connection and increasing work related skills relevant to their communities' way of life.

The curriculum contains 12 units developed in partnership with indigenous culture bearers and Elders. Each lesson includes regionally specific learning stories and suggestions for adaptation for students of different ability levels. The pilot project is underway for the 2023/2024 school year at three sites: Hoonah, Buckland, and Grayling.

The curriculum can be found on the SESA website: <https://sesa.org/resources/educational/alaska-traditional-transition-skills/>

## Disability Innovation Fund

In collaboration with key agents of change, the Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) received a \$10 million 5-year grant to implement an innovative model demonstration project to help offset challenges faced by youth with disabilities in preparing for the workforce. The overarching project goal is to increase the number of Alaska youth and other individuals with disabilities who are competitively employed.

Programs to be developed and supported in this grant include each partner and the following projects:

Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)

- Youth Leadership Forum
- Immersive Youth Aviation Academy,
- Youth Emergency Management Program

University of Alaska Anchorage Center for Human Development (CHD)

- DB101 School and Youth Calculator
- Tapestry Expansion
- Alaska Indigenous Transition Skills Curriculum
- Program Evaluation

Southeast Alaska Independent Living (SAIL)

- RecWORKS!

Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education

- Project SEARCH
- Peer Power (Youth Outreach)

## Project SEARCH

Project SEARCH is a one-year internship program that provides real-life work experience to help youth with significant disabilities make successful transitions from school to adult life. Alaska has three sites: MatSu Regional Medical Center (Palmer/Wasilla), Providence Alaska Medical Center (Anchorage), and Fairbanks Memorial Hospital (Fairbanks). GCDSE supports the three Alaska Project SEARCH sites by serving as the statewide coordinator for Project SEARCH and participating in steering committee meetings for all sites.



Successful outcomes for program participants include employment in an integrated setting, working 20 hours a week or more and earning at or above minimum wage. The Alaska sites have received recognition for achieving 70 to 100% employment outcomes for their graduates and are due to be recognized for the 2022/2023 cohort at the 2024 National Project SEARCH conference.

To learn more and contact the site teachers, visit <https://health.alaska.gov/gcdse/Pages/committees/et/SEARCH.aspx>



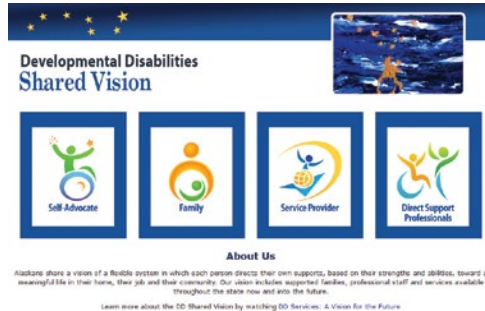
# Resources





# Resources

## Developmental Disabilities Shared Vision



Shared DD Vision website hosted by the Council. Alaskans share a vision of a flexible system in which each person directs their own supports, based on their strengths and abilities, toward a meaningful life in their home, their job and their community. Our vision includes supported families, professional staff and services available throughout the state now and into the future.

Website: <https://ddsharedvision.dhss.alaska.gov>

“Welcome to Alaska’s Shared Vision” video:  
<https://health.alaska.gov/gcdse/Pages/ddsharedvision/family.aspx>

Join the DD Shared Vision Alaska Facebook group led by self-advocates:  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/DDSharedVisionAlaska/>

## Empowerment Through Employment Guide



Employment Resources Guide for Alaskans with Disabilities. Helping individuals with disabilities who would like to know more about their employment-related options and resources in the state of Alaska.

Webinar: <https://health.alaska.gov/gcdse/Pages/committees/et/>  
Handbook: <https://health.alaska.gov/gcdse/Documents/EmpowermentThroughEmployment.pdf>

## Alaska Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act



Became law in 2016, this Act allows qualified individuals with disabilities the opportunity to save for qualified disability expenses without jeopardizing vital public benefits (such as SSI and Medicaid). Website: <https://savewithable.com/ak/home/plan-benefits.html>

# Alaska Disability Benefits 101 Website (AK DB 101)

## Disability Benefits 101

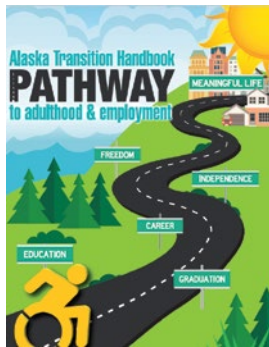
working with a disability in Alaska



AK DB 101 is a free website that assists individuals with disabilities and those supporting them to navigate through questions around how

benefits are impacted by work. To learn more and use this website which includes plain language articles with interactive tools in addition to a benefits to work calculator, visit: <https://ak.db101.org> For videos and additional tools on how to best use this exciting employment tool, visit the Council's resources page: <https://health.alaska.gov/gcdse/Pages/db101.aspx>

## Alaska Transition Handbook: Pathway to Adulthood and Employment



This Alaska specific resource is here to assist individuals with disabilities and those who support them in successful transitions. It includes success stories, information on state agency resources, benefits and work, savings, and employment support services.

To view a PDF copy of the handbook, please visit <https://health.alaska.gov/gcdse/Documents/TransitionsHandbook.pdf>

## Alaska Self-Advocacy & Leadership Opportunities Guide

### ALASKA ADVOCACY AND LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Share your voice and perspective with your community!

Self-Advocates have the opportunity to be involved in organizations that they love by joining boards or becoming members of organizations. Some members of these organizations are needed to ensure a disability rights in Alaska are fully shared. If an organization you know of is not listed here, we encourage you to check with the organization to find out how you can become involved.

#### DISABILITY-RELATED BOARD OPPORTUNITIES

<b>CHALLENGE ALASKA</b> Helps the State of Alaska with... • Alaska Department of... • Alaska Department of...	<b>PEER POWER</b> The organization... • Alaska Department of... • Alaska Department of...	<b>KEY COALITION</b> A group of organizations... • Alaska Department of... • Alaska Department of...	<b>STONE EQUIP GROUP</b> A group of people... • Alaska Department of... • Alaska Department of...
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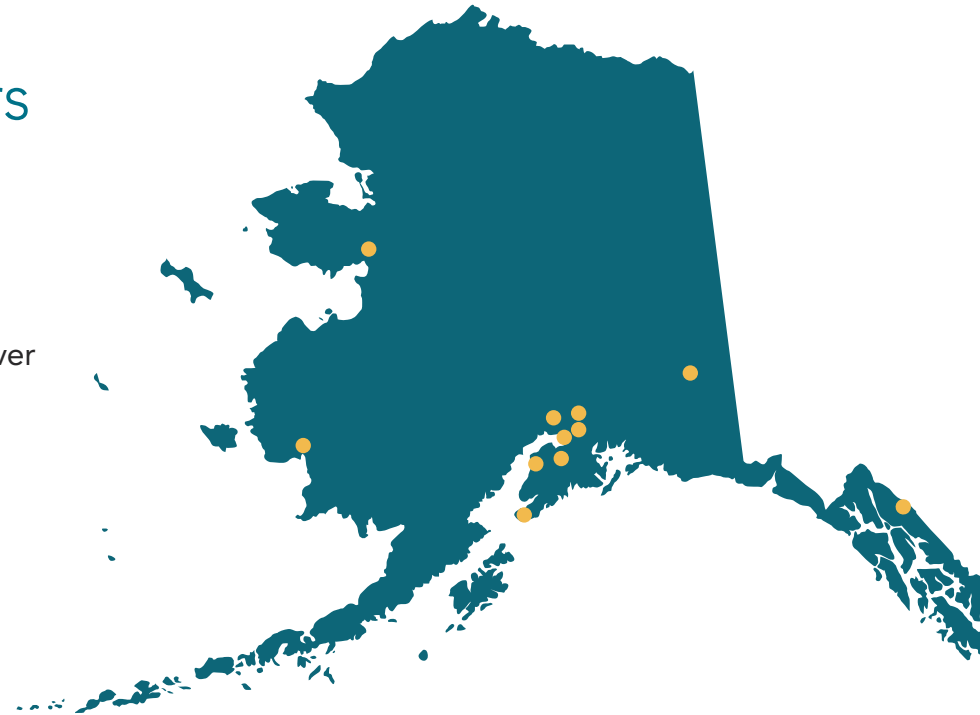
Get engaged in self-advocacy through one of the many Alaskan self-advocacy groups. To view the recorded webinar on Alaska Advocacy & Leadership Opportunities and access a PDF copy of the guide:

Introductory Webinar: <https://vimeo.com/650469937>

Website: <https://health.alaska.gov/gcdse/Documents/AlaskaAdvocacy--August2021.pdf>

# Council Members

- Anna Attla — Anchorage
- Christine Bohan — Palmer
- CB Brady — Anchorage
- Chelsea Burke — Eagle River
- Jena Crafton (Chair) — Eagle River
- Art Delaune — Fairbanks
- Garrett Dominick — Soldotna
- Don Enoch — Juneau
- Margaret Evans — Anchorage
- Dave Fleurant — Chugiak
- Jeanne Gerhardt-Cyrus — Kiana
- Corey Gilmore — Anchorage
- Kenneth Hamrick — Anchorage
- Elizabeth Joseph — Kongiganak
- Heidi Lieb-Williams — Anchorage
- Duane Mayes — Anchorage
- Tony Newman — Juneau
- Caitlin Poindexter — Anchorage
- Sabrina Richmond (Vice Chair) — Juneau
- Nona Safra — Homer
- Demii Van Dusen — Tok
- Shelly Vendetti-Vuckovich — Anchorage
- Marlene Wenger — Copper Center
- Representative Stanley Wright — Anchorage



## Council Staff

- Patrick Reinhart, Executive Director
- Lanny Mommsen, Research Analyst III
- Rich Saville, Program Coordinator II
- Jamie Kokoszka, Program Coordinator II
- Samantha Vetter, Program Coordinator I
- Michael Stevenson, Business Services Program Manager I
- Ian Miner, Administrative Assistant



State of Alaska  
Governor Mike Dunleavy

Department of Health  
Governor's Council on Disabilities & Special Education

Patrick Reinhart, Executive Director

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