



GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON
DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL EDUCATION



ANNUAL REPORT

2025

Table of Contents

Message from Sabrina Richmond, Council Chair	2
Letter from Patrick Reinhart, Executive Director	3
About the Council	6
Amplifying Advocate Stories	7
Legislative Outreach Efforts	8
State Representation.....	8
Federal Representation.....	8
Goal Overview	9
Goal 1: Community Inclusion, Supports & Services (CISS)	9
Goal 2: Self-Advocacy & Leadership (SAL)	10
SAL Highlights.....	11
Goal 3: Employment	11
By the Numbers	11
Education (SEAP and ICC)	13
Council Members	17
Council Staff	18

Message from Sabrina Richmond, Council Chair

Hi, I am Sabrina. I live in Juneau in my own home with support staff. I have been a member of the Governor’s Council on Disabilities and Special Education (also called the Council, “full Council,” or GCDSE) for 3-1/2 years. Before I became Chair, I was the Chair of the Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC), which is part of the full Council. Then I became Vice Chair of the full Council, and most recently, they voted me as the Chair. It’s a tough job, but someone has to do it!

I have my own business, Alaska Ability Art, where I make acrylic paintings. I enjoy roses as a subject, and animals. When I first started, that idea came out of my head and I enjoyed it. I also have begun to work with slate rock projects recently — so, instead of painting on paper, making the paintings on the rock surface to give a different feel.

I also have worked with preschoolers for almost a decade and am still working from afar with these youth. One of my former caregivers became a preschool teacher, and through them I was able to connect with the kids. I enjoy working with the kids by showing them that they can play with people with disabilities and interact with everyone

I really like leading the Council. There are so many things we are responsible for and must do. Did you know the GCDSE has five major federal and state responsibilities? They are:



Sabrina Richmond, Council Chair



- State Developmental Disabilities Council (SDDC)
- Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP)
- Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC)
- Special Education Service Agency (SESA)
- Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority Advisory Board for beneficiaries with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities

Most other states divide these duties and have separate boards, but not Alaska. We are big and think big. Between the many committee meetings, and meetings with state officials and lawmakers, plus federal officials and our Congressional delegates, it keeps me and all our Council members very busy. I really want to thank all the 24 Council members appointed by the Governor for their dedication and continued hard work. They volunteer their time, and that is not a small thing at all, especially with how much we have going on. I also want to recognize and thank the Council members who transitioned off our board this past year, especially Jena Crafton, who was the previous Chair and helped me learn while I was Vice Chair. I also want to thank our dedicated professional staff. They keep it all moving by organizing meetings, providing professional assistance to put our ideas into action, and communicating with our members and partners daily. Thank you all!



– Sabrina Richmond, Council Chair

Message from Patrick Reinhart, Executive Director



Patrick Reinhart, Executive Director

2025 was a challenging year for the Council — marked by both progress and setbacks for the people we serve. I won't go into all the details, but the shifting tides of the federal administration and changes to our funding sources left us questioning whether our Council and our federal developmental disabilities partners would even survive. It was a stressful time for all of us in this work.

Yet, thanks to persistent advocacy and education efforts with lawmakers and administration officials, we managed to maintain our funding levels. Still, the storm of change continues to rock the boat that supports the lives of our beneficiaries across Alaska. That's why we remain vigilant and committed to protecting the systems and supports that have taken decades to build, so that our friends, neighbors, and family members with disabilities can fully participate in their communities.

Closer to home, we experienced both victories and disappointments. One major success was convincing the Legislature to invest \$5.7 million in the Infant Learning Program (ILP), highlighting the potential for hundreds of millions in future savings in Special Education costs. Unfortunately, the Governor vetoed the funding, reminding us that we must do more to demonstrate the long-term value of early investment — especially in a time of tight state revenues. On a brighter note, several of our legislative priorities made meaningful progress, including:



Patrick Reinhart, Executive Director

- **HB 26** – Public and Community Transit
- **HB 141** – Adult Changing Facilities
- **SB 178** – ILP Program Changes
- **HB 39 / SB 8** – Education for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

We'll pick up where we left off in January and continue pushing to get these important bills passed. Thank you to everyone who has supported these efforts!

I also want to extend my deepest gratitude to the **Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority** for their steadfast support of advisory boards like ours. Their investment in Council staffing beginning in FY27 is a game-changer. Additionally, their support for two key projects — **Adult Changing Spaces** and **Project SEARCH** — deserves a big round of applause. Bravo to the Trust staff and trustees!

This year, we also said goodbye to several valued Council members and one staff member, Michael Stevenson. Our heartfelt thanks go to Michael and to the following individuals for their dedication and service: **Jena Crafton**, former Chair and tireless advocate, **Nona Safra**, **Garrett Dominik**, **Rep. Stanley Wright**, and **Dave Fleurant**.

At the same time, we welcomed new members whose passion and commitment are already making a difference: **Rep. Andi Story**, **Myrna Johannsen**, **Mariah Krueger**, and **Karen Heath**. Working alongside them — and the rest of our dedicated Council

members and mission-driven staff — has made my role incredibly rewarding.

That’s why it’s bittersweet to share that I’ve announced my second retirement from the State of Alaska, effective late spring 2026. The Council has six months to prepare for this transition, and I have every confidence they’ll continue to thrive.

As for Lisa and me, we’ll be settling more deeply into life at our little log cabin on the South Kenai Peninsula. But know this: I won’t stray far from my life’s work and passion for building stronger, more inclusive communities for our brothers and sisters with disabilities. I’ll see you around — somehow, some way.



With love,
Patrick Reinhart
 Executive Director

About the Council

The Governor’s Council on Disabilities and Special Education (GCDSE, or “the Council”) is made up of self-advocates, parents, professionals, and partners working together to advance the inclusion and independence of Alaskans with disabilities.

The Council primarily functions as an advocacy and advisory board; board representatives function by educating public and government members on issues and needs of the intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) community. The Council also fills other roles, as the Statewide Interagency Coordinating Council and the State Special Education Advisory Panel, for needs and issues impacting students with disabilities.





Amplifying Advocate Stories

"Nothing about us without us!"

The primary role of the Council is the advocacy work by our council members, per our function under the Developmental Disabilities Act. The Council works with partners, agencies, and advocates to educate legislators,

state leadership, and the public about considerations and needs of the DD community. This work is always guided by our north star, the DD Shared Vision, which was passed into Alaska Law in 2018.



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 through the state now and into the future."



Legislative Outreach Efforts

State Advocacy

Council members made over **50 Legislative visits** to state representatives, to track and support these **Five Statewide Legislative Priorities**:

- Infant Learning Program (ILP) expansion and funding
- Special Education Services Agency (SESA) funding
- Transportation
- Universal Changing Spaces
- Education for Deaf and Hard of Hearing

and proactive relationships with our congressional delegation via successful virtual meetings with all three members of the Alaska delegation. Additionally, congressional staff from all three federal delegates' offices attended our May 2025 Council meeting in person to give presentations and answer our questions. We appreciate and continue to grow our strong relationships with our federal representatives.



Federal Advocacy

While travel was limited this year due to an executive order, the Council succeeded in maintaining positive



Goal Overview

The Council uses a five-year plan to outline work that members and staff will dedicate time toward. Goal areas are chosen by Council members based on community input, feedback, and needs. We will be entering a new five-year plan in October 2026, and toward that effort staff and members conducted **10 Community Forums** to speak to individuals and get input to better design the goals of the next five-year plan.

See our current [GCDSE Five-Year Plan](https://health.alaska.gov/media/ld0nouz3/2021-2026_stateplan.pdf) (https://health.alaska.gov/media/ld0nouz3/2021-2026_stateplan.pdf)

Goal Areas



Goal 1: Community Inclusion, Supports, & Services (CISS)

Expanding access to meaningful support systems so individuals with disabilities can live their chosen lives

The CISS Committee has worked with outreach and trainings for needs and projects to better individuals' ability to involve themselves in their communities. Efforts from the members and staff include housing, medical services, transportation, guardianship, rights, and resources for services and supports. Some of the specific work involved opening up and continuation of Supported Decision-Making Agreements for those with guardianship, mini-grants for direct resource needs, and involvement in the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (the Trust) Board of Trustees to advise about projects and funding for programs and needs statewide.

Some efforts this year included successful introduction of [HB141 - Universal Changing Spaces in Public Buildings](#), due to the joint efforts of the Council and Key Campaign supporters. Support of this evolving bill will continue next session, with efforts and testimony made by members and supporters having been a focus this year.

Another major effort was support of the Key Coalition of Alaska's **Key Campaign**. In March 2025, four council members and

two staff joined the incredible turnout for a record-breaking Key Campaign in Juneau. Over 150 advocates and partners and their advocacy efforts mirrored the Council's own efforts for ILP funding expansion and support for legislation around Universal Changing Spaces. Our council was influential in garnering two keynote speakers, U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski and Alaska's Attorney General Treg Taylor.

CISS Personal Story Highlight:



Inspired by the lived experiences of Alaskans like Judy Edwards, who for years had no dignified or safe place to change her adult son in public spaces, advocates began elevating the urgent need for Universal Changing Spaces across the state. Through the Council's support and additional testimony during Key Campaign, this effort grew into a shared call for accessible infrastructure

that respects every Alaskan's right to participate fully in public life. That collective work culminated in the introduction of *HB141: Universal Changing Spaces in Public Facilities*, bringing this long-overdue solution to the Alaska Legislature. The efforts to move this bill forward will continue in our 2026 session.

Goal 2: Self-Advocacy & Leadership (SAL)

Increasing opportunities for individuals to express and advocate for themselves at all levels

With leadership and stories about work, play, and community, self-advocates and parents/guardians bring forth important information about needs and considerations in the lives of people with disabilities. Members are often providing training and outreach to partners and the general public, such as with engagement at the I Have Rights/I Have Dreams presentations at the UAA Center for Human Development's Full Lives Conference and the Trust's Improving Lives Conference, as well as ongoing mentoring of new self-advocates and other emerging leaders. Notably, self-advocates have either chaired or co-chaired the Council for the last four terms, showing how we prioritize leadership by those with lived experience.

SAL Highlights
Council members and staff:

- Partnered with other Alaska DD Network providers to move the **Shared Vision 2.0** work forward and continue efforts to increase goals of the Shared Vision in Alaska Policy (<https://health.alaska.gov/en/senior-and-disabilities-services/governors-council-on-disabilities/advocacy/>)
- Participated in statewide **Disability Pride/Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) events**, engaging with over 400 attendees



- Facilitated two **Legislative Advocacy Trainings**, one with AK Advocates, for over 35 attendees learning how to engage lawmakers
- Advised Alaska Training Cooperative partners for accreditation with the National Association of Direct Service

Professionals for development of 102 hours of **Direct Support Professional certification training**, including 42 topic areas, such as participant empowerment, community living skills, and advocacy



- Worked with SAL Staff on Emergency Preparation outreach, promoting the updated **Get Ready Toolkit** (<https://health.alaska.gov/media/konegsxd/readynowtoolkit-web.pdf>) and providing multiple presentations and webinars on emergency preparedness needs for individuals with disabilities

Goal 3: Employment

Supporting employment for people with disabilities to be able to get information on how to go to work, gain training and supports to work, understand benefits while working, and go from school to work

Members and staff on the Employment Committee worked to promote programs and services to ensure people with disabilities successfully become employed. Outreach included the ABLEtoSAVE campaign and National Disability Employment Awareness Month, as well as statewide involvement in workgroups and partnerships involving employment programs and workforce development. Under the state's Disability Innovation Fund Grant, the Council supported youth-focused programs, partnering with the Statewide Independent Living Council of Alaska (SILC), UAA's Center for Human Development, Southeast Alaska Independent Living (SAIL), and the Alaska Department of Education & Early Development (AK DEED) to support events that help young people leaving school gain skills and supports to achieve gainful careers and independence.

The Council serves as the Statewide Coordinator for the Alaska Project SEARCH program, a training model focused on getting students in their final year of school into competitive integrated employment through internships and skills training. Currently there are three Project SEARCH sites: one each in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and the Mat-Su.

By the Numbers

The Council provided:

- Over \$26,000 in training, support, and equipment for three Project SEARCH

sites serving 34 interns in 2025

- **Support for site staff attending the 2025 National Project SEARCH Conference**, to complete a presentation to other national partners and train with national and international Project SEARCH teams
- **83% AK Project Search employment outcomes** for the last five years at all sites (percent of interns who gained employment at the end of their program, working 16 hours or more at minimum wage or better in an integrated work setting)
- **Employment-related presentations by Council members or staff** at statewide conferences and events, on topics including employment benefits, youth employment transitions projects, and supported employment practices
- **Over \$73,000 in Trust Microenterprise Grants, awarded to support 16 self-employment opportunities**, including four business owners experiencing an intellectual and/or developmental disability



Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP)

The Council, in its role as the SEAP, advises and assists the State of Alaska Department of Education and Early Development (DEED) to improve special education services for children with disabilities from ages 3 through 21. The Panel has been monitoring changes to the U.S. Department of Education, the Office of Special Education Programs, and the Office of Civil Rights to stay informed of potential impacts on Alaskan students with disabilities. It has also begun working on recommendations for strengthened education and professional development policies for paraeducators, recognizing their importance in our special education classrooms.

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

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, ages birth through 3 years. Through advocacy led by the ICC and other partners, a bill was introduced in the Alaska Senate to lower the eligibility requirements for the EI/ILP. We are hopeful this bill will pass in the coming Legislative session. Though we succeeded in initially achieving a **\$5.7 million increase** for the EI/ILP in the statewide budget, this was not approved. The ICC will continue to advocate for the passage of the Senate bill and an appropriate level of funding for the EI/ILP. If more children can receive services earlier in life, they will 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 SESA's governing board. In 2025, **SESA provided technical assistance to nearly 22,000 people**, including but not limited to school administrators, special and general education teachers, paraeducators, family members, self-advocates, and Tribal leaders. One of the many invaluable services SESA provides is the Anne Freitag lending library, which supports all 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. In 2025, they checked out 1,245 items across the state.

Inclusive Practice and Paraeducator of the Year Awards 2024-2025 School Year

The Council has established annual awards to be given at the **Annual Statewide Special Education Conference** each February. The Inclusive Practice Awards honor outstanding educators and paraeducators who work to ensure students with disabilities have the opportunity for inclusive education with their general education peers. Whereas numerous educators deserve recognition for a multitude of reasons, the focus of this award is exclusively on exemplary inclusive practices. This year we gave three awards: Paraeducator of the Year, to Alicia Rodarte-Gouldin, of Mountain View Elementary, Kenai; the Inclusive Practice Award (Individual), to Winter Marshal Allen, of Homer High School; and the Inclusive Practice Award (Team), to the Chugiak High School Life Skills Team.

Alicia Rodarte-Gouldin, of Mountain View Elementary, Kenai; the Inclusive Practice Award (Individual), to Winter Marshal Allen, of Homer High School; and the Inclusive Practice Award (Team), to the Chugiak High School Life Skills Team (Kaleb Kuehn, Suzy Bick, Jonnie Snell, Julia Gray, Kim Robuck, and Keelie Wyrick).



Students and teachers from the Chugiak High School Life Skills class accept their award





Council Members

Anna Attla | Anchorage
Christine Bohan | Palmer
CB Brady | Anchorage
Art Delaune | Fairbanks
Don Enoch | Juneau
Margaret Evans | Anchorage
Jeanne Gerhardt-Cyrus | Kiana
Corey Gilmore (Vice Chair) | Anchorage
Lisa McDonald | Soldotna
Elizabeth Joseph | Kongiganak
Tony Newman | Juneau
Caitlin Poindexter | Anchorage
Sabrina Richmond (Chair) | Juneau
Demii Van Dusen | Kenai
Shelly Vendetti-Vuckovich | Anchorage
Marlene Wenger | Copper Center
Rep. Andi Story | Juneau
Mariah Krueger | Anchorage
Scott Lindbloom | Palmer
Myrna Johannsen | Ketchikan
Karen Heath | Anchorage



Thank you to our outgoing members:

Jena Crafton (Former Chair) | Eagle River
Garret Dominick | Soldotna
Kenneth Hamrick | Chugiak
Nona Safra | Homer
Rep. Stanley Wright | Anchorage
Dave Fleurant | Eagle River

Council Staff

Patrick Reinhart, Executive Director
Chelsea Burke, Operations Manager
Lanny Mommsen, Research, Health, & Advocacy Coordinator
Rich Saville, Education & Early Childhood Coordinator
Jamie Kokoszka, Legislative & Special Projects Coordinator
Samantha Vetter, Business & Employment Systems Coordinator
Ian Miner, Administrative Coordinator





State of Alaska
Governor Mike Dunleavy
Department of Health

Governor's Council on Disabilities & Special Education
Patrick Reinhart, Executive Director

Robert B. Atwood Building 550 W 7th Ave, Suite 1220, Anchorage, AK 99501

Toll Free: 1-888-269-8990 | Phone: 907-269-8990 | Fax: 907-269-8995

Email: gcdse@alaska.gov

Website: <https://health.alaska.gov/en/senior-and-disabilities-services/governors-council-on-disabilities/>

Social Media: <http://www.facebook.com/gcdse>

Published January 2026