

Disability Rights Rhode Island 2024 Focus Areas

Disability Rights Rhode Island (DRRI) is the independent, federally mandated Protection and Advocacy System (P&A) for the state of Rhode Island. We are one of 57 P&As, one in each of the United States, territories, and the District of Columbia.

DRRI's mission is to assist Rhode Islanders with differing abilities in their efforts to achieve full inclusion in society and to exercise their civil and human rights through the provision of legal advocacy. DRRI utilizes various legal and advocacy strategies, including litigation.

We administer nine federally funded programs, each addressing specific legal and advocacy needs for people with disabilities. Our grant requirements, along with feedback from community members, inform us as we regularly develop and evaluate focus areas to guide our work and allocate our resources. We solicit annual community feedback on our focus areas, and we make revisions to our focus areas, as necessary and appropriate, every three years.

Our focus areas encompass two areas. The first area is systemic work which is legal and/or advocacy work on behalf of groups of people with disabilities. It includes activities such as high impact litigation and investigations. The second area is individual legal case representation. Below are DRRI's focus areas in both systemic work and individual legal case representation.

2024 Systemic Focus Areas

1. Behavioral Healthcare for Prisoners with Mental Illness

- Improve behavioral healthcare for prisoners with mental illness in order to eliminate the use of solitary confinement.

2. Supported Decision-Making

- Educate and train individuals, families, educators, advocates, the judiciary, and governmental personnel about the importance of Supported Decision-Making (SDM) for people with disabilities in retaining decision-making authority in their own lives.

3. Services and Supports for Inclusive Community Living

- Reduce unnecessarily prolonged hospitalization or other institutionalization of people with developmental and intellectual disabilities and/or behavioral health disabilities.
- Pursue systemic work and collaborations that increase the availability of and access to

community-based supports and services. These are services that increase the numbers of people with disabilities who are able to live in the community with necessary supports and services, including access to affordable and community-based residential living, competitive integrated employment, and transportation.

4. Safeguarding Social Security Beneficiaries

- Safeguard the rights of Social Security beneficiaries whose benefits are paid to and managed by representative payees, pursuant to referrals by the Social Security Administration.

5. Voting Rights and Access

- Advance full participation of people with disabilities in the electoral process.

6. Investigations and Monitoring

- Conduct investigations of reports of abuse and/or neglect, and monitor for potential abuse and/or neglect in residential, psychiatric, healthcare or other facilities that provide services or supports to people with disabilities.

7. Outreach and Training

- Conduct outreach and training concerning systemic and legal representation focus areas as limited resources allow.

2024 Legal Case Representation Focus Areas

1. Safety and Guardianship

- Investigate reports of abuse and neglect, including at facilities and segregated schools; take legal action when necessary to protect victims of abuse and neglect.
- Represent a limited number of persons contesting guardianship or the reasonableness of continuing a guardianship, a petition for guardianship, the scope of a guardianship, or the appointment of a particular person as a guardian, to provide assistance with Supported Decision-Making or other forms of less restrictive decision-making.

2. Assistive Technology

- Represent persons denied, or incurring delays in acquiring, technology devices or services from public funding sources such as Medicare, Medicaid, school districts, and vocational rehabilitation.

3. Employment

- Represent persons denied, or incurring delays in receiving, appropriate vocational rehabilitation, employment network, or independent living services.
- Represent persons in efforts to obtain appropriate Social Security Administration work incentives.
- Represent person denied reasonable accommodations in employment when those accommodations are necessary to maintain or advance employment; represent Social Security beneficiaries who are otherwise discriminated against in employment.
- Represent Social Security beneficiaries concerning work-related Social Security Administration matters or other issues that constitute a barrier to employment.

4. Residential and Community-Based Services

- Represent persons who remain in hospitals or other restrictive environments due to a shortage of appropriate community alternatives.
- Represent persons denied reasonable accommodations, or otherwise discriminated against, in residential settings.
- Represent persons denied eligibility for IDD services.

5. Government and Public Accommodations

- Represent persons denied physical accessibility, policy modifications, or auxiliary communication aids and services by state or local governments.
- Represent persons denied physical accessibility, policy modifications, or auxiliary communication aids and services by testing services.
- Represent persons denied physical accessibility, policy modifications, or auxiliary communication aids and services by health care providers.
- Represent persons denied full participation in the electoral process.

How We Review Requests for Assistance:

While DRRI would like to assist all individuals who reach out to us for help, we do not have the financial or staff resources to do so. At times, we must make difficult choices. The factors considered when determining acceptance of individual cases include the following:

1. Availability of alternative representation or resources in the community.
2. Availability of DRRI financial and staff resources.
3. Strength of the evidence and legal grounds supporting an individual's claim.
4. Inability of the individual, his/her parent(s), legal guardian, or interested person to advocate.
5. Immediacy, severity, and duration of the effect of the threatened harm to an individual.
6. Greater vulnerability of the individual based on economic, social or minority group status.
7. Likelihood that a successful result in an individual's case will have a positive impact upon other individuals.

While not all factors must be satisfied for us to accept a case for representation, they are important considerations for resource allocation. One of our goals is to avoid duplication of services by other community organizations, so that we may assist those who are most in need, and thereby ensure that the greatest number of individuals may benefit from our legal and advocacy efforts.

DRRI makes every effort to serve the needs of people with disabilities but we regret that eligibility for services is not an entitlement. Our intake staff are trained professionals and our intake process is thorough and comprehensive in order to determine how we may best serve the greatest number of people with disabilities – either directly, or by referring them to appropriate alternative resources.

Contact Us!

To request legal assistance from DRRI, you can call us or submit an online intake form at <https://drri.org/drri-intake-form/>.

For additional information about DRRI and our services, please visit our website at www.drri.org, or call us at 401-831-3150.