Governor's Council on Disability and Special Education

COUNCIL MEMBER UPDATE

October 31, 2026

From the Desk of the Executive Director:

Dear Council Members,

As I look out my window and see snow, I can't help but think about Christmas music, warm bowls of soup, and a slower pace! While things seem to be moving quickly in many areas of life, I'm looking forward to the comforts of the season ahead.

Thank you all for your participation in our October Council meeting. While some conversations were challenging, I am genuinely excited about our direction. We are returning to the fundamentals of good governance, strengthening our policies and procedures, and ensuring our practices align with our responsibilities. I look forward to learning and improving together as we work to model a healthy, effective, and transparent Council.

I'm also excited to **welcome two new Council members appointed on 10/20**! Don Clack, with Anchorage School District, joins us in the Special Education seat, and Dave Berube, our partner from Disability Law Center of Alaska, fills the Protection and Advocacy seat. With these appointments, we now have just two vacancies remaining: one Self-Advocate seat and one seat designated for the Alaska Commission on Aging.

A few updates as we move forward:

- Communication: You may notice more meeting invitations as we work to ensure all members have opportunities to participate. Attendance is only expected for committees on which you serve. We are also working toward distributing approved committee minutes monthly to keep everyone informed.
- Legislative Priorities: Conversations are beginning about our priorities for the upcoming legislative session. Please feel free to join the Legislative Committee meetings to stay up to date with our progress.
- Save the Date: Our next Full Council meeting will be February 9–11, 2027, in Juneau. Additional details will be shared soon as we begin coordinating travel and preparations.

Thank you again for your engagement, thoughtful feedback, and commitment to the Council's work. I'm grateful for the opportunity to continue moving forward together. With Election Day approaching on November 3, I encourage everyone to exercise their right to vote. Your voice matters!

Warmly, Chelsea

Executive Director, GCDSE

OCTOBER ACTIVITY RECAP

Employment First Conference: National Disability Employment Awareness Month kicked off and we were fortunate to partner with Dept. of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) to co-host the 2nd bi-annual Employment First Conference! It featured so much growth from 2024, with expansion to a 2 day event filled with information and sessions for employers, individuals with disabilities, and youth in transition to adulthood. feedback received showed the event was well received, and total attendance was 140 people (including the vendor booths, which there was 18). There was featured speaking from Commissioners of Dept of Health and Dept of Labor and Workforce Development and Directors Burke and Duder. Chelsea delivered closing remarks on day one of the Employment First Conference, highlighting the importance of youth employment programs like Project SEARCH in creating opportunities for young Alaskans with disabilities to experience the benefits of meaningful work and build pathways to independence. We also got a hear Maggie Winston bring it all together at the closing plenary on day 2 so we really had some impactful highlights all around.

Other features was Sam moderating the *Hiring and Retention Panel* which held many of our Project SEARCH partners and one of the former Project SEARCH interns! We even had Joy Buress, our National Project SEARCH liaison, speak at a session and join a healthcare panel (which also had another former intern on it!) Kudos to our council members Dave, Mariah, Lisa, and Karen for participating in various roles during the conference, so much fantastic representation!

Don't have fear of missing out! We made sure to record the sessions to ensure outreach and access for those that couldn't make it - videos to be uploaded later at https://employmentfirstalaska.com/ and right now you can still watch the sessions from 2024 under the resources tab!



Photo description: Sam, Cathy, Katrena, Mariah, and Dante on stage with features styled mountain decorations and blue curtains for backdrop for the Hiring and Retention Panel with ASL interpreter.

OCTOBER ACTIVITY RECAP pt.2

Summitt on Aging: The Statewide Living Council hosted the Statewide Summitt on Aging, which Lanny participated in planning. With over 30 presentations and 200 attendees it was a packed event (88 speakers over the three days!). Chelsea was part of a panel on Aging with IDD in Alaska where she shared waitlist and HCBS data and stressed the importance of workforce supports in our system to see full choice and independence for those utilizing waiver services.

AADD Face-to-Face: Jamie and Lanny attended AADD's Face to Face meeting October 27 & 28 'Grounded in Purpose: Building What's Next'. The meeting focused on where we are, and as well as where we are headed and what is next. A few highlights included Rural Health Transformation Fund projects that AADD has received funding for:

- The Road Home: Intensive Care and Community Integration for Alaskans with Complex Care
- Strengthening Alaska's Rural Disability Workforce and Support Systems (The Goodlife Project). Goodlife is a pioneer in remote support.

Other Technology that opening new possibilities for Alaskans with disabilities was also highlighted, this was including MapHabit/Vivo and a pilot for a DSP consultation Tool.

Child Conference: Rich was at Division of Early Childhood International Conference in Omaha, NE 10/26-29 joining nearly 1,000 attendees. He attended sessions on maximizing Medicaid reimbursement and workforce development as well as a session on fiscal mapping that focused on the Alaska ILP expansion effort and initial report. It was great to see our hard work getting some international attention!

REMIND, it's election season so go out and vote!
Election day is Nov 3rd! Voting information can be found here:

State of Alaska: Division of Elections
https://www.elections.alaska.gov/
or use the TTY telecommunications device by calling (907) 465-3020.

Voter Accessibility Assistance Information:
https://www.elections.alaska.gov/voting-assistance/#lets-begin
Division of Elections: (907) 465-4611, toll-free: (866) 952-8683 (within the U.S.), or TTY: (907) 465-3020.

GENERAL COUNCIL NOTIFICATIONS

Staffing hiring updates: Final selecton and offer occured at the end of October, we have new planner joining the team soon!

Council Membership Update: Along with our two new members Sabrina has now appointed **Art Delune as the new CISS Chair**! We thank Art for his leadership.

Council Meeting Feedback from October Meeting:
Seven Council members completed the October meeting feedback survey.

Key Findings:

- Accessibility: Most respondents were able to request needed accommodations or did not require additional supports.
- Technology: Audio quality and hybrid participation were the most common areas identified for improvement.
- Meeting Materials: Feedback was generally positive, with suggestions for printed materials and continued advance distribution.
- Meeting Procedures: Members expressed interest in clearer voting processes, meeting facilitation, and continued guidance on Council procedures.

Staff Response and Next Steps: Overall, staff felt the October meeting was successful, with strong preparation, teamwork, and meaningful participation. We appreciate the feedback and recognize opportunities to continue improving the meeting experience.

The Atwood Conference Center provides an accessible, no-cost meeting space, and Zoom allows us to offer hybrid participation alongside funded travel opportunities for in-person attendance. While technology can present challenges, staff identified an audio issue involving one of the microphones and will work with IT to improve testing and troubleshooting at future meetings. Staff have also established a two-week timeline for distributing meeting materials in advance, with printed copies available upon request. Moving forward, we will focus on improving hybrid participation, attendance tracking, roll-call voting procedures, and accessibility coordination. We will also continue supporting members as we strengthen our understanding and consistent application of the bylaws and meeting procedures.

We appreciate everyone's patience, flexibility, and participation as we continue refining our processes. Broader governance and meeting format considerations will be addressed with the Executive Committee as appropriate.

PARTNER INFO, POLICY WATCH, AND UPDATES

From AADD:

Key Campaign travel funds will be available - mark your calendars: The Key Coalition of Alaska, which is a coalition of partners that includes AADD, AADSP, the Infant Learning Program Association, the Governor's Council and Peer Power, is working on plans for a "big" Key Campaign in Juneau this year. Funding will be available to support travel - so far funding has been secured from the Mat-Su Health Foundation and the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education. An additional funding request is pending with the Alaska Mental Health Trust.

The plan is to be in Juneau March 17-18. AADD's legislative committee has been meeting to identify legislative priorities. Reach out to Kim Champney or Ian Casey if you are interested in joining AADD's legislative advocacy workgroup.

Upcoming RHTP convenings: The Department of Health is coordinating local discussions related to the Rural Health Transformation Program. DD providers are encouraged to participate in these local conversations which focus on strengths and gaps, followed by a visioning session and relationship-building. Three local convenings are coming up: October 27 in Utqiagvik, November 9 in Kodiak and November 17 in Juneau. If you are interested in participating in one of these meetings, complete this form.

NACDD Info:

One Vote Now started to help people with disabilities understand their rights as voters. One Vote Now works to improve the voting experience of people with disabilities. We do this by encouraging voter registration. One Vote Now also provides information about elections and resources on polling place accessibility. Learn more at https://nacdd.org/one-vote-now/

Olmstead Explainer: NACDD's explainer shared what are people's rights, what states can do, and how communities can advocate. See the resource here

National Update: Health Survey Redesign: The CDC is proposing changes to the 2028 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), including removing questions that help identify people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). These changes could make it harder to understand the health needs of people with IDD and plan appropriate services and supports. The National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (NACDD) has signed on to a comment letter from the Consortium for Constituents with Disabilities (CCD), urging the CDC to preserve disability-related questions and ensure people with disabilities are accurately represented.

UPCOMING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

C.I.S.S.
- Nov 24, 11-12 PM

S.A.L.
- Nov 12, 11 - 12:30 PM

Employment
- Nov 17, 12 - 1:30 PM

S.E.A.P.
- Nov 17, 10-11:30 AM

Legislative
- Nov. 12, 12:30-2 PM

Executive
- Nov 9, 2 - 3 PM

Optional Training
- Nov 17, 11 PM

S.E.S.A.
- Held 9/30

NOVEMBER UPCOMING ACTIVITITES

Alaska Deaf Council Luncheon
Nov 5th
Hotel Captain Cook

October was NDEAM and ADHD Awareness Month,

November is National Family Caregivers Month
Find more on the National Council on Aging Website here

REMINDER FOR THE NEXT COUNCIL MEETINGS
Winter Council Meeting: Feb 9-11, 2027 in Juneau

GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

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WWW.LINKSPRC.ORG

Join **LINKS Community Parent Resource Center, MSBSD,** and **IDEA Homeschool** for a

FREE

one-day Transition Summit & Resource Expo connecting students with all disabilities ages 14–21, families, educators, and community partners to resources for a successful transition to adulthood.

SAVE THE DATE!

NOVEMBER

2

2026

1 PM-5 PM

Mat-Su Career & Tech High School

2472 N Seward Meridian Pkwy, Wasilla

ATTEND FOR OUR GRAND *Prize Drawing!*

LINKS Resource Center

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

IDEA HOMESCHOOL

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PATHWAY TO THE FUTURE

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

2026 - 27 TRANSITIONS SERIES

Discover resources and information on some of the topics offered:

- Employment and Disability Benefits
- Youth Training Programs
- Advocacy
- IEPs and School
- More!



FINAL WEDNESDAYS OF EACH MONTH, 6 PM TO 7:30 PM

Find on Stone Soup Group Calendar at
https://www.stonesoupgroup.org/

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GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL EDUCATION