2021

Dear Friend,

On behalf of Disability Rights Connecticut (DRCT), we write to express our appreciation for your support during the past year. We have used your input to prioritize the issues that will be the focus of our work in 2022. We now ask for your assistance to help us continue our work to improve the lives of people with disabilities by donating this holiday season at https://www.disrightsct.org/.

This past year has been one of significant growth and accomplishment for DRCT. With your help, we can do even more to advance the rights of people with disabilities. Here are just a few of the ways in which our advocacy efforts, in specific instances during the past year, not only proved successful, but brought results of that will have ramifications beyond these cases. They provide a window into what DRCT can do sufficient resources and underscore the significance of your ongoing support.

**Extending Special Education in Connecticut**

In July, DRCT and its co-counsel, Jason Kim, of Schneider Wallace Cottrell Konecky Wotkyns LLP, a California-based law firm and Sonja Deyoe a solo practitioner based in Rhode Island, prevailed in a case challenging Connecticut’s rule prohibiting students in special education to continue working toward their diploma beyond the age of 21 violated the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act which requires that such students be provided this opportunity up until their 22nd birthdays.

The Court found that Connecticut’s existing system, which for the past 40 years has ended special education for students before they turned 22, “constitutes a gross violation of the IDEA” and Connecticut’s “systemic’ disregard of the IDEA’s age provisions … deprived some students of IDEA rights entirely.” The Court also agreed with the award of compensatory education for students who have been exited from special education because they had turned 21. As a result of DRCT’ legal advocacy, students who are eligible for special education will be able to continue their education until they graduate or they turn 22 years old, whichever occurs first.

**Robotic Arm Case: Advocacy for Independence**

DRCT successfully advocated on behalf of a woman with physical disabilities in need of a robotic arm so that she could live independently and participate in the community. The state erroneously denied coverage for the arm on the basis that it was experimental, even though it has been approved by private insurance companies and by other states around the country. Shortly after the advocacy was initiated, DRCT learned that a second person in Connecticut had also been denied coverage for the robotic arm. DRCT sent a demand letter to the State insisting that it cover the arm for the client, as it is legally obligated to do. As a result of DRCT’s advocacy, the state agreed to rescind its policy and approve the coverage for the robotic arm.

**Children’s Behavioral Health Advocacy Initiative**

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In July of 2021, DRCT launched its new children’s behavioral health initiative to monitor, investigate abuse and neglect allegations, and advocate on behalf of children and youth residing in psychiatric facilities throughout Connecticut. As a result of DRCT’s monitoring activities, DRCT identified deficient conditions of care. These deficiencies included: defective smoke detectors with wires dangling from them and accessible to the children; filthy bedrooms, living rooms, bathrooms, and kitchens; broken windows and furniture; worn out carpeting; lack of bed sheets and blankets; lack of storage areas; unnecessary segregation of children with physical disabilities; and unsupervised access to small toys that could be easily ingested.

Because of DRCT’s advocacy, the facility administrators agreed to immediately cure the deficiencies, including changing a policy to ensure that children are supervised when playing with small toys and taking steps to ensure that children and youth are living in substantially safer conditions.

Over this past year, DRCT also worked on other systemic legal and other advocacy initiatives including:

- advocacy to ensure that people with disabilities that affect their ability to communicate receive effective communications in healthcare settings;
- supported decision-making as a guardianship alternative;
- investigation and remediation of abuse and neglect;
- voting access;
- solitary confinement and in-cell shackling of individuals with mental health disabilities in Connecticut’s correctional system;
- conditions of care for individuals confined to Whiting Forensic Hospital; and
- advocacy for individuals with disabilities to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

DRCT also has expanded its outreach to underserved populations, including communities with whom we had not previously engaged, through the work of a new full-time community engagement advocate. And DRCT received grant money from Administration for Community Living (ACL) which provided an opportunity to hire a temporary advocate to provide community engagement and advocacy to ensure that individuals with disabilities, particularly those from traditionally underserved communities, receive information about the availability of the COVID vaccine and reasonable modifications to obtain the vaccine.

Additionally, during this past year, DRCT launched a first-time children’s’ behavioral health initiative, responding to growing concerns and a substantial increase in cases across the state.

Your Support is Pivotal

These efforts – and others like them – vividly illustrate the critical nature of the work we undertake, and the far-reaching impact of the results we earn. If DRCT is to continue moving forward to accomplish the indispensable goal of achieving full equality and justice for people with disabilities, we need your help to advance our work and extend our impact!

We would greatly appreciate your donation – in whatever amount is comfortable for you. It will, unquestionably, make a difference.

- We know what can be done, because we have seen what can be done.
- We know that effective advocacy gets results, because we have seen the results.
- And we know that your support is essential to our efforts, because we have seen how, with sufficient resources, we can meet the moment in so many pivotal ways.
To donate online, please visit www.disrightsct.org. Choose the Get involved drop-down menu and click on Donate.

You may also provide your contact information if you would prefer to donate by mail.

We are grateful for your support of DRCT and the unwavering advocacy we proudly provide. We wish you all the best throughout the coming New Year, on behalf of everyone at Disability Rights Connecticut!

Sincerely,

Deborah A. Dorfman
Deborah A. Dorfman
Executive Director/Attorney

Kathryn du Pree
Kathryn du Pree
DRCT Board President