

## Who We Are

As the state's designated Protection and Advocacy system, Disability Rights Wisconsin has partnered with and advocated for individuals with disabilities since 1977. We are an independent agency and our primary goal is to protect the civil and human rights of people with disabilities. Utilizing individual casework and public policy advocacy, Disability Rights Wisconsin (DRW) works to ensure individuals with disabilities are free from abuse and neglect, are able to exercise their civil rights, have access to education, and can participate meaningfully in their communities.

To extend and enhance the work of the P&A, DRW also has programs that address other areas where people who have disabilities often need advocacy. These include advocacy for victims who have experienced crime and violence and advocacy for individuals having challenges accessing the supports and services they need. DRW also hosts attorneys who support Disability Benefits Specialists around the state and the Medicare Part D Hotline.

## Our Vision and Mission

**Our vision** is that all persons with disabilities and their families shall be empowered to exercise and enjoy the full extent of their rights and to pursue the greatest possible quality of life.

**Our mission** is to challenge systems and society to achieve positive changes in the lives of people with disabilities and their families.

## Protection and Advocacy System

- Protection from abuse and neglect
- Access to services and supports
- Participation and engagement within community
- Discrimination
- Protection of rights, including student rights to inclusive education, patient rights, voting (*Disability Rights Wisconsin Voter Hotline at 844-347-8683*), and basic rights that support self-determination.

### **Advocacy services for individuals may include:**

- Information and Referral
- Technical Assistance
- Individual Case Representation
- Legal representation

### **Public policy advocacy may include:**

Disability Rights Wisconsin challenges public officials to create or change legislation, regulations, rules and policies that have positive impacts on people with disabilities. DRW provides people with disabilities with information about that might affect them. As part of our public policy work, Disability Rights Wisconsin:

- Works with people with disabilities to make sure they have a chance to express their opinion on policies that affect them and to advocate for change;
- Builds partnerships with other disability organizations;
- Helps people with disabilities, their families, and the community better understand the rights of people with disabilities through trainings, guides, and other materials;
- Engages with legislators and other policy makers about issues that impact the rights of people with disabilities.

### **DRW PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY PRIORITY ISSUES AND PROGRAMS**

- **Abuse and Neglect:** DRW addresses problems of abuse and neglect in institutions and the community, including for people in psychiatric institutions, hospitals, group homes, nursing homes for individuals under 60, intermediate care facilities for people with developmental disabilities, day-programs, sheltered workshops, jails and prisons. DRW also reviews significant issues of abuse and neglect by guardians, powers of attorney or representative payees.
- **Community Services:** DRW provides assistance to adults and children under age 18 in accessing community mental health services, including Community Support Programs (CSP), Targeted Case Management (TCM) and Comprehensive Community Services (CCS), and children's mental health systems as well as supported housing for people with mental illness. DRW may provide assistance to Medicaid recipients in accessing Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT), including systems issues related to the NEMT transportation broker. DRW may assist Medicaid recipients in denial, reduction, termination of therapies and Medicaid personal care services. DRW will represent or provide technical assistance in limited cases.
- **Deinstitutionalization:** DRW supports the right of people with disabilities to live as independently as possible and in the community. DRW is designated by the state as a member of the closing team when a nursing home, psychiatric facility, or long term care facility for people with developmental disabilities closes. Our staff assists residents and families during the relocation process and ensure their rights and preferences are respected, and help them obtain proper discharge planning and appropriate amounts of quality community services.
- **Patient Rights:** DRW works to ensure privacy, safe environments, and appropriate plans for people with disabilities to leave an institution and move back into the community with services or supports. DRW may also provide assistance to patients who are being improperly discharged from hospitals or nursing homes.
- **Special education:** DRW's schools team works to support students who receive special education services by promotion of their rights under IDEA including promoting the inclusion with their regular education peers, and limiting the use of

suspension, expulsion, and the inappropriate use of seclusion and restraints of children with disabilities. Staff also works to support appropriate transition planning and the use of Assistive Technology in a student's individual education plan.

- **Return to work:** DRW assists individuals who receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) overcome barriers preventing them from returning to work. Advocates may assist with DVR services, supported employment, employment networks, and employment accommodations or discrimination.
- **Assistive Technology:** DRW staff work to make sure that insurances (Medicaid, Medicare, Medicaid Waivers or Managed Care Organizations and occasionally private insurances) and schools provide people with disabilities the assistive technology they need to be as independent as possible and participate fully in their communities.
- **Voting rights:** DRW staff ensures that individuals with disabilities are able to access their right to vote whether it is overcoming physical barriers to polling place access or challenging effort that have the effect of disenfranchising them. For assistance, contact the DRW Voter Rights Hotline are 844-347-8683. DRW provides training and resources in partnership with the Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition at <https://disabilityvote.org/>
- **Employment Discrimination:** DRW staff provides information and guidance on workplace rights including how to ask for and receive a reasonable accommodation in employment, dealing with workplace discrimination or harassment and filing discrimination complaint if necessary. Staff provides direct representation in some cases of egregious employment discrimination.
- **Housing Discrimination:** DRW provides information and guidance on how to ask for a reasonable accommodation in housing, explains to individuals on how to file a discrimination complaint, and fights efforts to limit housing opportunities for people with disabilities. Additionally, DRW provides direct representation in a limited number of housing discrimination cases.
- **Barriers to accessibility:** As a disability rights organization DRW performs a significant amount of systemic work regarding access to transportation, public accommodations, and government services and ensuring architectural accessibility. Attorneys will provide information, technical assistance, and occasionally representation regarding denials of access.
- **Engage in a targeted outreach effort to advocacy agencies working with underserved communities** (communities of color, tribal communities, ethnic groups, LGBTQ communities, immigrant and refugee communities) to determine what barriers members with disabilities and mental illness encounter accessing services and supports. Partner with advocacy agencies by sharing disability perspective and expertise to support their efforts to overcome those barriers.

## DRW's Additional Programs

In addition to the federal P&A system, we receive funding from the State of Wisconsin and foundations to provide services that focus on specific needs in the disability community.

These programs include:

### **Disability Benefits Specialists Training and Support**

Our Disability Benefits program attorneys support and train Disability Benefits Specialists from Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRC's) who help people understand their benefits and get the benefits they need.

### **DRW Medicare Part D Helpline, 800-926-4862**

DRW operates a statewide helpline, the Medicare Part D Disability Drug Benefit Helpline, to help people with disabilities and their families or guardians with Medicare Part D.

### **Family Care and IRIS Ombudsman Program**

Our Ombudsman can help individuals navigate the Family Care and IRIS programs, so they can stay in their homes and get the supports they need to stay independent.

### **SSI Managed Care External Advocacy Project**

Our SSI MC advocates provide information for people who have questions about the SSI Managed Care Program and provides advocacy services to people enrolled in the SSI HMOs.

### **Victim Advocacy Program**

DRW provides support to people with disabilities who have been victims of crime and their families to ensure they understand and know how to exercise their rights while working within the criminal and civil justice systems.

## How to request help

To find out if we can help, contact us in one of the following ways:

- **Telephone** (toll free): **800-928-8778**. When you contact us by phone, a receptionist will ask you for some initial information.
- **On-line**: Submit your request to be contacted on our website.  
<https://www.disabilityrightswi.org/about/contact-us/>
- **Email**: Send an email to [info@drwi.org](mailto:info@drwi.org). When contacting us by email, please include your name and contact information, who you are contacting us about (yourself, family member, or other), what city/town or county the person with a disability lives in, and a brief description about your concern or issue that you are requesting help for.
- **Mail**: Include the same information as listed above for email. Mail your request to Disability Rights WI, Attn: Intake, 131 W. Wilson Suite 700 Madison, WI 53703
- **Voting Assistance**. For assistance with voting questions or help filing a complaint, contact the DRW Voter Hotline at 844-347-8683/ 844-DIS-VOTE or email [info@disabilityvote.org](mailto:info@disabilityvote.org)