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*Your Policy, Training, and Technical Resource*

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# 2017 Annual Report

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## About the Agency

The Minnesota Council on Disability (MCD) is a state agency created in 1973 by the Minnesota Legislature tasked to advise the Governor, the State Legislature, state agencies, and members of the public on disability issues. The Council operates through a small staff and is governed by a council appointed by the governor. MCD provides leadership to empower and strengthen the rights of Minnesotans with disabilities. Our Council collaborates with the public and private sectors as a policy, training and technical resource advisor.

## Our Work

The Minnesota Council on Disability analyzes legislative initiatives and advises how proposed policies will impact the disability community. The goal is to ensure that policymakers understand the effects of their decisions on Minnesotans with disabilities.

MCD examines issues and disseminates information fairly and objectively, promoting self-sufficiency and choice for all individuals. The work of the Council strives to empower Minnesotans, so that opportunity expands throughout the state and the quality of life is improved for all. MCD provides customized training on a variety of issues and serves as a technical expert on disability matters.

The Council works on a wide breadth of issues ranging from the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), building access, digital and electronic access, access to culture and recreation, emergency preparedness, transportation matters, employment rights, and much more. Where disability is involved, the Council is a resource for all.

The Minnesota Council on Disability works towards living in a world free of barriers. Where there are no barriers, there are fewer limitations.

## Public Policy

The Minnesota Council on Disability made major strides in 2016. This section outlines legislative issues that the Council worked on.

## Legislative Preview

### *2016 Legislative Forum*

In December, the Minnesota Council on Disability convened the annual **Legislative Forum**, a community discussion between legislators and their constituents. A wide range of issues were discussed, such as autonomous vehicles, Medical Assistance spend down reform, Olmstead Reform, and the Personal Care Assistant (PCA) workforce shortage. Senator Jim Abeler, incoming chair of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee, and Claire Wilson, Department of Human Services Assistant Commissioner charged to lead the Community Supports Administration, shared their perspective on the up-coming session.

### *2016 Legislative Successes*

#### **Barrier removal**

Working in tandem with the Chamber of Commerce and numerous disability advocacy groups, MCD successfully ushered through the passage of new legislation surrounding barrier removal for ADA compliance. The law shifts the focus to finding proactive, collaborative solutions to help small business owners meet their obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The law also set guidelines for demand letters to ensure focus is on barrier removal and do not deprive business owners of resources while leaving barriers in place.

#### **Funds for ADA outreach**

In conjunction with the barrier removal legislation, MCD received funds to partner with the Department of Labor and Industry to engage and educate business owners about meeting their obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The funds have been successfully directed towards conducting trainings around the State to equip business owners with the expertise necessary to provide greater access for customers with disabilities.

#### **Disability initiatives funding**

Several Minnesota agencies that serve people with disabilities received funds from the Legislature to carry out important disability related objectives. The Olmstead Implementation Office was granted

\$148,000 for capacity building and community engagement. State Services for the Blind and the Centers for Independent living received \$1,000,000, with an additional \$500,000 apiece added to their respective base appropriation going forward. Additionally, the Legislature set aside \$2.5 million in grant funding for day training and habilitation services who work to align with Minnesota's Olmstead Plan.

### *2017 Legislative Platform*

#### **Funding for accessibility outreach and engagement**

In the 2016 session, working in partnership with the Department of Labor and Industry, MCD received a one-time appropriation for ADA outreach and education. MCD hopes for additional funds to continue the successful engagement underway with stakeholders around the State on issues of physical and digital access.

#### **Technical fix for the State Access Code**

The State of Minnesota's Building Code accessibility guidelines state that State-owned facilities built or remodeled after July 1, 1963 are required to meet the accessibility requirements in place at the time of construction or remodeling. If they choose to remodel, they must come into full accessibility compliance, but they are not required to remodel, solely for the purpose of becoming accessible. This does not conform to federal requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act, which state that all public accommodations must be accessible. While the change would not add any obligations that the State is not already subject to under the ADA, MCD proposes removing this language from the State Building Code to preclude any confusion about what the State's obligations are for accessibility.

#### **Disability parking plates legislation**

When a person with a disability turns 18 and is no longer a minor, their name must be on the title of a vehicle in order to qualify for disability parking plates. This poses a challenge for the caretakers of adults with disabilities. MCD seeks to remove this requirement from statute to ensure all caretakers have access to disability plates.

## Engaging our Community

The Minnesota Council on Disability collaborates with public and private partners to effectively serve as the voice in our government for people with disabilities. This section describes how we engage with members of the public and our private partners to effectively serve Minnesotans with disabilities.

### Advocacy

#### *ADA Training*

MCD provides technical assistance and education on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and accessibility concerns across Minnesota. For decades, the agency's capacity to provide this service has been limited to less than one person. The recent spike in lawsuits has increased Minnesota businesses' demand for the services the Council provides. This year, MCD received one-time funding to increase institutional capacity to provide outreach around the state to any entity who wants to learn more about meeting their obligations under the ADA. We have conducted webinars and presented in places like Austin and White Bear Lake. This outreach has generated excitement among businesses and other organizations who, until now, were largely unaware of how the ADA affected them. Businesses are *more than willing* to make their facilities accessible to people with disabilities and comply with the ADA; they just did not know where to find the tools to do so.

This year has seen a dramatic rise in the number of businesses who utilized MCD to remove barriers that prevented people with disabilities from buying goods and services. Providing inclusion and meeting ADA obligations is the best way to avoid lawsuits. MCD is uniquely positioned to assist anyone who needs more information on the ADA and designing for an inclusive experience. As a core agency operation, this is a public service that is good for the disability community and businesses alike.

### Community

#### *Partnership with Rajoqab*

Early in 2016, the Council was contacted by and met with the Somali disability advocacy group Rajoqab (Hope in Action). Rajoqab, MCD, and many other stakeholders met to discuss opportunities available to ensure people with disabilities are afforded their civil rights to participate in Minnesotan society. Rajoqab consists of people from all over Minnesota of various ages and disabilities. At MCD it is our responsibility to connect people with disabilities, especially those who have been marginalized, to available supports. After conversing with the group, it was clear that they are individuals who have been relegated to the periphery of society both in their countries of origin and in Minnesota. Our state needs the talents and skills this community possesses and is eager to share. Rajoqab is a community of

unique individuals, are recent immigrants of African heritage who have disabilities, and are in many cases at an economic disadvantage compared to other Minnesotans.

Rajoqab's position is clear, no one is seeking a hand out. What they want is a chance to become part of Minnesotan society. How long will we continue to relegate people with disabilities, immigrants, and those with African heritage to the periphery of society? MCD views this group of skilled, motivated, organized individuals as an opportunity to move the dial on a problem Minnesota has been talking about for far too long.

### *26<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the ADA Celebration*

The Council on Disability and Minnesotans from around the State gathered at the Minnesota History Center to celebrate the 26th Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The event featured a keynote address by Ken Rodgers, Chair of the Minneapolis Advisory Committee on People with Disabilities. A lively panel discussion featured Mai Thor, Outreach Coordinator with the Metropolitan Council, Char Diamond Coal, producer and curator of the disability art series ZagZum, Fardowsa Ali, an advocate for Somali immigrants with disabilities, and MCD Councilmember Carlos Vazquez. The panel discussed the issue of diversity within the disability community.

Finally, Angelique Lele, Miss Wheelchair Minnesota, and the dance troupe Young Dance performed and provided dance instruction for audience members of all abilities. Our annual ADA celebrations continue to serve as a wonderful opportunity for the disability community to gather together to celebrate the progress of the disability movement, learn about new issues affecting the disability community, and remind ourselves what is at stake for Minnesotans with disabilities if the movement does not continue to progress.

### *2016 Minnesota State Fair Booth*

August brought yet another successful year of constituency engagement at the Minnesota State Fair. We were joined by a number of important guests, as well. Commissioners from the Departments of Administration, Education, Commerce, Labor and Industry, Higher Education, Human Services, Health and Human Rights visited the booth, along with Secretary of State Steve Simon and the Governor's Chief of Staff, Jaime Tincher. We are grateful for each official's willingness to give their time to share information about the services their departments provide for people with disabilities.

Additionally, we continued to expand the cultural element of our booth. Visitors had the opportunity to write their own disability haikus, listen to live music, meet both the current and former Miss Wheelchair Minnesota and pick up posters of incredible art, done by Minnesotan artists with disabilities. The MCD State Fair booth continues to be a space where Minnesotans with disabilities can gather, be informed and celebrate disability culture.