

**Louisiana State Bar Association's  
Legal Services for Persons with Disabilities Committee  
Meeting Time: January 23, 2025**

**Attendees**

*Chris Edmunds, co-chair*

*Debra Weinberg, co-chair*

Blake Allen, Southeast Louisiana Legal Services

Meanie Bray, DRLA

Mariarenee Contreras, NCSC

Garret DeReus, Attorney

Jessi Dominique, Law Clerk

Sara Godchaux, Loyola University College of Law

Eva Kalikoff, Bizer & DeReus

Hector Linares, Loyola University Professor Youth Justice Clinic

Amber Sheppard, Attorney

Derek Warden, Louisiana Supreme Court

**LSBA Staff**

Rebecca Collins

Monte Mollere

Stephanie Beaugh

**Meeting Minutes**

- I. Welcome & Introductions** – Debra Weinberg welcomed everyone.
- II. Approval of August 15, 2024 and October 24, 2024 Meeting Minutes** – There was not a quorum of committee members present at the meeting. A vote to approve both the August and October minutes will be sent to members via email.
- III. 2024-25 Committee Initiatives**
  - 1. Annual Disability Law Training Series that took place on Dec 13, 2024** – Chris Edmunds provided a brief recap, stating that the feedback on the December CLE was really good and that the presentations by Hector, Amber, and Dalton were well-received. The group discussed the value of these types of trainings in helping to address the lack of expertise in disability law among the broader legal community. Rebecca Collins mentioned that after the December CLE, the feedback was very positive, and a lot of the attendees expressed interest in more training on disability law issues. Rebecca stated that in a follow-up survey sent to CLE attendees, they identified topic areas

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such as ADA, employment, and workers' compensation as being of high interest for future trainings. Rebecca also noted that attendees requested more "education law 101" type presentations, similar to the one given by Dr. Wayne Hector, as there is a general lack of easily accessible training on disability law topics.

- 2. Other Initiative Ideas** – Melanie Bray introduced an idea that DRLA is considering of doing a CLE training on special education law, with an added component requiring attendees to take on at least one pro bono special education case. Melanie explained that this was a working idea to help supplement the resources of Disability Rights Louisiana, as they receive many requests for special education assistance. Chris Edmunds expressed that he really liked the idea, stating that it's great to try to "force people to put a little bit of skin in the game" by requiring pro bono work. He acknowledged the overwhelming number of special education inquiries that organizations like his receive. Melanie further elaborated that the goal would be to provide a comprehensive training to make the area of special education law less intimidating for attorneys, as it can feel like a very complex and overwhelming practice area. Monte Mollere suggested reaching out to the pro bono organizations to get their input on the best way to structure such an initiative, as they have experience with similar efforts. Garret suggested starting with a more limited scope project, such as a pre-screening or document review task, to get attorneys' feet wet before taking on full client representations. The group discussed the importance of clear communication around the limited scope of the representation to manage expectations. Overall, the group seemed very receptive to Melanie's proposal and engaged in a productive discussion about the best ways to implement such a training and pro bono program.

#### **IV. Policy, Legal, and Legislative Updates**

- 1.** Chris Edmunds provided an update on recent actions by the Department of Justice (DOJ) under the new administration. He stated that the DOJ has suspended all civil rights-related actions, including: No new amicus briefs, No new Statements of Interest, No new enforcement actions. Debra Weinberg noted that this could have a significant impact on a recent regulation that recognized gender dysphoria as a disability. She explained that there was a lawsuit challenging this regulation, and with the DOJ no longer defending it, the regulation could be in jeopardy of being overturned through a consent judgment. Melanie Bray expressed deep concern about the broader implications of this DOJ action. She explained that the plaintiffs' arguments in the lawsuit were not just targeted at the gender dysphoria regulation, but were aimed at gutting the entire Section 504 of the

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Rehabilitation Act. Melanie stated that this could have cascading effects, potentially undermining the protections of Section 504, which is the foundation for many disability rights laws.

2. Derek Warden built on this, mentioning a separate lawsuit challenging the abrogation of sovereign immunity under Title II of the ADA. He noted that a potential Supreme Court ruling on this case could have significant consequences for the overall validity of the ADA. Derek shared the official published version of his dissertation with the summary of state disability rights laws (it starts at page 136 of the appendix) ([dissertation](#)). The group engaged in a broader discussion about the implications of these policy and legal changes, expressing deep concern about the potential erosion of disability rights protections, even if the ADA itself is not directly targeted.
3. Debra Weinberg also raised concerns about proposed changes to Medicaid, which could impact many individuals with disabilities who rely on Medicaid, either alone or in conjunction with Medicare. She suggested the National Health Law Program (NHELP) as a valuable resource for information and updates on these Medicaid-related developments.

**V. Other Business**

1. Debra Weinberg raised concerns about the lack of disaster response for the recent cold weather event, stating that she has seen "basically no disaster response" compared to the typical hurricane response. She mentioned reaching out to the Governor's Office of Disability Affairs and volunteer organizations, but they have not been very responsive. Debra offered to help connect individuals with disabilities who are experiencing serious impacts due to the weather, such as issues with medical equipment or access to healthcare. She encouraged the group to share any information about problems or resources that could be helpful.
2. Stephanie Beaugh mentioned that she is the staff liaison for the Access to Justice Commission's Accessibility Committee, which focuses on a variety of accessibility issues, including disability access and language access. She shared that the committee is in the planning stages of a project to create a "bench book of accessibility issues for judges" and may need assistance from the expertise of this committee.
3. Debra Weinberg raised the issue of the DAN directory, stating that it can be difficult for people to navigate and that it may not be effectively highlighting attorneys who specialize in disability law. Debra suggested that it may be a good idea to send an email blast to the entire bar, inviting attorneys to join the DAN directory and provide their information, potentially using a simple Google form or document to make the process easier. Rebecca Collins indicated that she would look into the capabilities of the DAN directory and explore ways to make it more searchable and useful for this purpose.

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**VI. Adjournment – Next Committee meeting is Thursday, April 24, 2025 at noon**