



# Advocacy Matters

A digital newsletter produced by the  
New Jersey Self-Advocacy Program

## February 2026

We have a lot to say, so make sure to click  
**"View entire message"** if it appears at the bottom of this  
newsletter. [If you have been forwarded this message, you can  
subscribe here.](#)

## February Campaign

January 20th marked the inauguration of New Jersey's 57th Governor, Mikie Sherrill. Governor Sherrill was sworn in at NJPAC in Newark, NJ.

NJSAP has created a campaign to welcome in our new Governor and introduce her to the NJSSAN, The Arc of NJ, and the local chapters of The Arc all around our state.

Join our campaign by clicking the graphic below, downloading it to your device and posting it to social media to welcome our new Governor!



Use these templates to post to social media:

Instagram:

- #HelloGovernor Sherrill! We look forward to opportunities to engage with this administration and to help ensure that people with disabilities remain involved in the decisions being made at every level of government. [@MikieSherrill](#)  
[@newjerseysap](#) [@TheArc\\_Us](#)

Facebook:

- #HelloGovernor Sherrill! We look forward to opportunities to engage with this administration and to help ensure that people with disabilities remain involved in the decisions being made at every level of government. [@MikieSherrillForNewJersey](#)  
[@newjerseySAP](#) [@TheArcofNJ](#) [@TheArcUs](#)

Twitter/X:

- #HelloGovernor Sherrill! We look forward to opportunities to engage with this administration and to help ensure that people with disabilities remain involved in the decisions being made at every level of government. [@MikieSherrill](#) [@NJSAP](#)  
[@TheArcofNJ](#)

BlueSky:

- #HelloGovernor Sherrill! We look forward to opportunities to engage with this administration and to help ensure that people with disabilities remain involved in the decisions being made at every level of government. [@mikiesherrill.bsky.social](#)  
[@NJSAP.bsky.social](#)

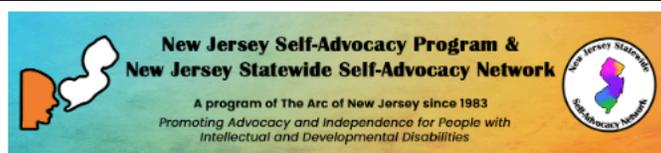
## Council Agenda Items

This month our Council's worked on these items:

- A few of the Council's met in person for their retreat. At the retreat they elected new officers, created their goals for 2026, and priorities for the year.



- The Advisory Board wrote a letter congratulating Commissioner Dr. Stephen Cha to his new position. It is important that the new Commissioner is familiar with the NJSSAN and the work that self-advocates do around the state. You can click on the image to download the letter to your device.



Dear Commissioner Dr. Stephen Cha,

I hope this message finds you very well. We are members of The New Jersey Statewide Self-Advocacy Network (NJSSAN). The NJSSAN is a statewide network made up of people with disabilities who come together from across New Jersey to advocate on the issues that matter most to our community. The NJSSAN is grounded in the belief that people with disabilities are strongest when their voices are heard directly and meaningfully in decisions that affect their lives.

On behalf of the NJSSAN, congratulations on your new role with NJ DHS as Commissioner! We extend our warmest wishes to you as you begin your service and we wish you lots of success in this important role.

The NJSSAN is organized into 6 regional councils, based on the county in which members live. Each council works collaboratively to identify and advocate for their priorities such as marriage equality for people with disabilities, accessible and reliable public transportation, affordable and inclusive housing, competitive and integrated employment opportunities, access to home and community-based services (HCBS), and other issues that our members identify as important to their quality of life and independence.

As your tenure begins, we want to share our enthusiasm for working together in the future. We believe that meaningful collaboration between state leadership and self-advocates is essential to creating policies that are inclusive, effective, and equitable. We look forward to opportunities to engage with your administration and to help ensure that the needs, experiences, and perspectives of people with disabilities remain involved in the decisions being made at every level of government.

Thank you for your commitment to serving New Jersey. We look forward to the possibility of working together to build a more inclusive state for all.

Sincerely,

*Evelyn Ramundo*

Evelyn Ramundo  
President of the Advisory Board  
The New Jersey Statewide Self-Advocacy Network (NJSSAN)

## Advocacy In Action



"Life be messy and there's no big enough bounty to clean it up. We be all oops as we ebb and flow in our life and yet we're just as amazing and great as anybody else. The full spectrum of awesome cool beans life!

The February holiday reminds me about the emotion 'love' and how it impacts the function of all emotions in our life. It doesn't matter what our function is, or labels, or words, that others place upon us. The emotion 'love' (and the spectrum of our function) be no label, it's only life and that be my life. All lives are on all the same spectrum- life, love, happy and joy, as well as sad and painful, so why try to separate us as we all ebb and flow through life."

-Ginamarie

New Jersey State Advocate

# Advocacy Trainings

If you would like the NJSAP team to provide a training to your group please reach out to us at [NJSAP@ArcNJ.org](mailto:NJSAP@ArcNJ.org) or fill out our [training request form here](#). Our Training and Technical Assistance Coordinator, Bianca, will happily get back and arrange a time and day for the training!

On February 19th, Bianca Najera delivered a training to The Arc of Salem on Personal Independence. 27 participants were in attendance! This training is about how independence develops, different responsibilities, and how to advocate.



On February 20th, Bianca Najera delivered a training to Midland on Personal Independence. 38 participants were in attendance! This training is about how independence develops, different responsibilities, and how to advocate.

## New Resources

These new resources are available on [our website](#), or you can click on them to download them directly to your computer!



## TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Transport Type	Cost	Travel Time	Reliability	Safety	Accessibility	Availability
Car						
Train						
Bus						
Bike						
Walk						
Taxi/Rideshare						
Airplane						

Use this chart to figure out the best transportation option for any situation and location! Click for a digital option.

### More helpful tips for when you're on the move!

#### Know Your Schedules

- Time management is a skill
- Plan to arrive early
- Traffic and delays happen
- Always have a backup plan

#### Know Your Route

- Know stops before and after yours
- Holidays & weekends are different
- Train lines and bus numbers matter

[www.njsselfadvocacyprogram.org](http://www.njsselfadvocacyprogram.org)

#### Backup Planning

- Alternative routes
- Emergency contacts
- Printed schedules
- Phone battery backup

Trying to weigh the pros and cons of different methods of transportation? Try using this handy chart to figure out the best plan for you!

We also offer 'Quick Tips' on advocating, staying connected, and living independently, on our social media platforms:

**ADVOCATE**

Share an example  
Why the issue matters  
Make connections  
Say your ask

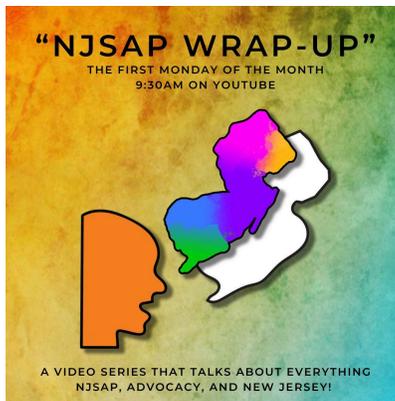
#### Quick Tip:

When you advocate, start with one example that shows why the issue matters, then explain how this one example is part of a bigger pattern, not an isolated case, and then say your ask.

This is a great way to quickly get across what you need when you don't have a lot of time. It is also a great way to get your point across in a way that people will know exactly what you want!

## NJSAP Wrap-Up

Every month Erin Smithers presents a short video on different aspects of The New Jersey Self-Advocacy Program. Visit our [Youtube Playlist](#) to see all the NJSAP Wrap-Up videos and learn all about our program!



This month Erin Smithers talked about the publications that NJSAP puts out. **Click on the images to visit the playlist or watch the video.**

## NJSAP Reach

**The Director of NJSAP, Erin Smithers, would like to attend your advocacy group to connect our program to yours, provide trainings and resources (including advisor trainings), or to help you start an advocacy group if you don't have one!**

Please reach out to Erin Smithers to schedule a visit: [ESmithers@arcnj.org](mailto:ESmithers@arcnj.org)



On February 27th Erin Smithers met with members of The Arc of Union's advocacy group, **The Arc A.E.R.O.s**. Erin spoke about current advocacy initiatives, the NJSSAN, and Updates at NJSAP!

The mission of The Arc A.E.R.O.s is to increase public awareness of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities; to provide education and social opportunities; to encourage individuals to find their own voice; and to support advocacy efforts for disability related issues. The group leaders and staff advisors encourage members to exercise free choice and decision making, and enjoy their individuality.

On February 19th Erin Smithers met with members of the new woman's advocacy group at MOCEANS, called HERizon. Erin talked about NJSAP, NJSSAN, and advocacy.

**MOCEANS Center for Independent Living, Inc.** is a consumer-driven, consumer-controlled organization serving all people with any disability, their families and allies in Monmouth and Ocean. We help people experiencing disability to solve problems, open minds and create opportunity. Moceans sponsors education, advocacy social connections and guidance to so people can choose how they live, work, and participate in the life of their community.

HERizon X moceans  
Center for Independent Living, Inc.

MOCEANS CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

TOPIC DISCUSSIONS:  
**What IS Self Advocacy?**

Join us for a HERizon session by  
Erin Smithers of The Arc of  
New Jersey Self Advocacy Project.

**February 19<sup>th</sup> 2026**  
**3:00PM - 4:00PM**  
Zoom ID: 878 6054 0838

SCAN THE QR CODE  
HERE TO RSVP!

For more information or to RSVP without scanning, go to [www.moceanscil.org/events](http://www.moceanscil.org/events)



On February 19th Erin Smithers met with Day Program Managers and staff who are a part of The Local Arc Chapters in NJ. Erin went over NJSAP, the NJSSAN, and spoke about upcoming campaigns and services offered through the program!

## March is Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

If you would like to participate in DDAM, fill out this template and email it back to us at [NJSAP@ArcNJ.org](mailto:NJSAP@ArcNJ.org) and let us know how you highlight your abilities!



**DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES  
AWARENESS MONTH**

**MARCH 2026**

**HIGHLIGHTING OUR ABILITIES**

**“Highlighting Our Abilities”**

**#DDAwarenessMonth2026 #DDAM2026**

**@NJSAP / @NEWJERSEYSAP**

**@THEAROFNJ / @THEARCUS**

**WWW.DISABILITYAWARENESSNJ.ORG**

## **Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month Contest Winner**

Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month (DDAM) is an opportunity to promote respect for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and to educate others about the abilities people with IDD possess.

Each year, NJSAP hosts a Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month contest. This year's contest we asked for a graphic to represent the theme for the month:  
Highlighting Our Abilities

Congratulations Maria for winning this year's contest! The winning graphic will be used throughout March to represent all communications for DDAM.

[The graphic is also available to purchase at Bonfire.com.](#) All proceeds benefit the NJSSAN advocates!



Congratulations to Maria Santos! Maria has been drawing for decades. She likes to get creative and make her own characters. Maria works at the Starbucks at the Grover Cleveland Service Area. One day Maria wants to go to a university and achieve her degree in journalism.

## Event Change



Going forward, the Luncheon and the Conference will become one event in the fall.

Interested in attending an event in the spring? Join us for our Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month events in March!

## Get Involved

Want to get involved in advocacy campaigns or upcoming events? Here is what is available.

Plan your own event with NJSAP! Reach out to Erin Smithers to get started:  
[ESmithers@arcnj.org](mailto:ESmithers@arcnj.org).



# Abilities2Love LLC

Empowering Adults with Disabilities to Build Friendships & Relationships

## SPEED DATING

### 4-Week Relationship Readiness & Social Skills Program

- **Week 1 – Understanding Relationships & Communication** 3/21/26
    - Healthy relationships
    - Boundaries
    - Reading emotions & social cues
  - **Week 2 – Developing Foundation Skills** 3/28/26
    - Energy in social settings
    - Initiating conversations
  - **Week 3 – Friendship Building & Community Interaction** 4/4/26
    - Start, build, and maintain friendships
  - **Week 4 – Relationship Readiness & Safe Dating Basics** 4/11/26
    - Safe dating tips
- RSVP by 2/21/26



Practice Social & Communication



Build Friendships & Meaningful Connections

- ♥ We Service All New Jersey
- ♥ We Are DDD-APPROVED • We also accept private pay

### Speed Dating Event (In-person)

- Post-program event - 4/28/26
- Eligible for adults 21+ who completed the 4 week course
- Enjoy guided social interaction
- Light refreshments
- Certificate of Completion

Serving Warren, Hunterdon, Somerset Counties



### Lamani's Coffee Market

156 Hudson Street  
Phillipsburg, NJ 08865

Call 908-899-1750

info@abilities2love.com

**In-person Event!**

Call 908-899-1750 to register for this 4 week Course on healthy relationships, dating, and social skills!

WITH A SUPERVISED ACTIVITY ROOM AND DINNER FOR YOUR STUDENTS!

MARCH **18** WEDNESDAY 5:00-7:00PM

## DINNER AND DEETS

### ABOUT TRANSITIONING TO ADULTHOOD

# Event

register here:

With presentations from

- THE ARC OF NJ'S PLANNING FOR ADULT LIFE: "SSI, MEDICAID, AND DDD SERVICES EXPLAINED"
- COMMUNITY ACCESS UNLIMITED: "SELF-ADVOCACY FOR STUDENTS WITH IDD"
- THE ARC OF ESSEX COUNTY: "ALL ABOUT THE ARC OF ESSEX"

*Come for the dinner, stay for the information!*

FREE PARKING | FREE EVENT  
THE ARC OF ESSEX  
50 BURNETT AVENUE # 3 MAPLEWOOD, NJ 07040

THE ARC OF ESSEX HUMAN SERVICES Division of Developmental Disabilities

Snacks generously donated by Inserra Supermarkets!  
Food Trucks: Kona Ice - Freakin' Vegan Brownie Bar - Mexi Boys

## WELLNESS FAMILY FESTIVAL

AND CHACK ENTERING HEALTH FAIR

APRIL 5, 2025 10-2 PM

West Milford High School

For more information contact: Highlands Family Success Center (973) 506-6575

### HEALTH FAIR:

- GLUCOSE: 2 hour fast
- BLOOD PRESSURE
- CHOLESTEROL
- BREAST EXAM
- GLAUCOMA TESTING
- VISION
- HEARING
- SENIOR SUPPORT
- MENTAL HEALTH
- SUBSTANCE USE
- EDUCATION
- COMMUNITY PROGRAMS
- SCHOOL PROGRAMS

**FREE!** Rain or Shine Snacks Giveaways

### CHILDREN'S CORNER:

- TOUCH-A-TRUCK
- KANDY THE CLOWN
- FACE PAINTING/PHOTO BOOTH
- DJ: TWIN OAKS ENTERTAINMENT
- INFLATABLE OBSTACLE COURSE
- SERVICE DOGS
- LAWN GAMES
- SPIDERMAN
- STAR WARS CHARACTERS
- EASTER BUNNY
- LOKAI ROSE
- BRICKS 4 KIDZ
- SCOUTS AND MUCH MORE!

### SPECIAL NEEDS for all ages:

- PHYSICAL THERAPY
- SPEECH THERAPY
- FEEDING THERAPY
- OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY
- EARLY INTERVENTION
- ABA THERAPY
- TRANSITION INTO ADULTHOOD
- DEVELOPMENTAL SUPPORT
- AUTISM SERVICES
- MEDICAID & MEDICARE
- DISABILITY SUPPORT

### PAIN MANAGEMENT:

- MASSAGE
- REIKI
- ACUPUNCTURE
- CHIROPRACTIC
- YOGA
- PHYSICAL THERAPY

OVER 70 RESOURCES AND FUN FOR ALL AGES!

growing our community together

passaic COUNTY NEW JERSEY, LIONS CLUB, WYOMING COUNTY, FAMILY SUCCESS CENTER, Center for Family Resources, WMMA, SleepRight

Join The Arc of NJ, CAU, and The Arc of Essex County for a free night of information all about planning for adult life and transition. All are welcome to attend this meeting! Click on the flyer to download a copy to your device. [Join the Coalition by registering here!](#)

This festival is a combined family event and community resource fair where state, county, local, and nonprofit organizations come together to connect residents with available services, volunteer opportunities, and networking with others.

### Take part in these current action alerts!



[Tell Congress: Increase the SSI Asset Limit!](#)



[Tell Congress What's at Stake for People With Disabilities](#)

Want to see everything The Arc of NJ has to offer? Sign up below to receive the newsletters from the different programs at The Arc of NJ



Sign up for CJAP



Sign up for Children's Advocacy



Sign up for Family Institute



Sign up for PFAL



Sign up for Healthcare Advocacy



Sign up for The Arc of NJ

## NJSSAN Calendars



We are holding monthly NJSSAN Council meetings *virtually!*  
**[For information regarding your Council area, please click here.](#)**

## NJSSAN Council Meetings 2026

### -JANUARY-

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

### -FEBRUARY-

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

### -MARCH-

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

### -APRIL-

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

### -MAY-

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

### -JUNE-

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

### -JULY-

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

### -AUGUST-

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

### -SEPTEMBER-

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

### -OCTOBER-

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

### -NOVEMBER-

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

### -DECEMBER-

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

Council 1: 3rd Wed. 5:30PM - 7PM  
Council 2: 4th Wed. 3 - 4:30PM

Council 3: 2nd Tues. 5:30 - 7PM  
Council 4/5: 3rd Wed. 3PM - 4PM

Statewide AM Council: 2nd Wed. 10- 11 AM  
Advisory Board: Last Mon. 3-4PM. Every other month. By Invite only.

# 2026 Calendar



Click on the image to download the calendar

Interested in joining the NJSSAN? See below to sign up for emails from your Council!

Council 1  
Hunterdon, Morris, Sussex & Warren  
Counties

[Join Council 1 Email List](#)

Council 2  
Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Passaic & Union  
Counties

[Join Council 2 Email List](#)

Council 3  
Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean &  
Somerset Counties

[Join Council 3 Email List](#)

Council 4  
Burlington, Camden, Gloucester & Salem  
Counties

[Join Council 4 Email List](#)

Council 5  
Atlantic, Cape May & Cumberland Counties

[Join Council 5 Email List](#)

Statewide A.M. Council  
All NJ Counties

[Join Statewide A.M. Council  
Email List](#)

The New Jersey Statewide Self-Advocacy Network (NJSSAN) is made up of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) throughout the state. The NJSSAN is used as a means of supporting positive change on both a personal and social level. It consists of 6 Councils based on geographic location within the state.

[You can read the current NJSSAN Priorities here.](#)

## NJ Statewide Self-Advocacy Network Position Statements

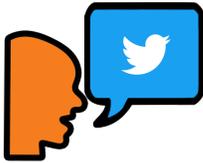
The New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project (NJSAP) is a program of The Arc of New Jersey established in 1983 to challenge individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to become involved in events, legislative policies, and issues that affect their lives or lives of others with disabilities.

We work together with these individuals to form The New Jersey Statewide Self-Advocacy Network (NJSSAN), which is used as means of supporting positive change on both a personal and social level. The NJSSAN consists of five Councils based on geographic location within the state.

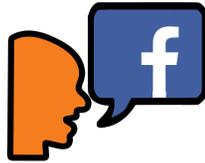
1. [Home & Community-Based Services \(HCBS\)](#)
2. [Housing for People with IDD](#)
3. [Transportation](#)
4. [Supported Decision Making and Alternatives to Guardianship](#)
5. [Raising Awareness of IDD Issues](#)

NJSAP@Arcnj.org    NISSAN POSITION STATEMENTS  
www.njselfadvocacyproject.org    732-749-8314

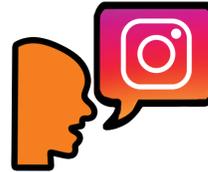
\*You are encouraged to share this information with others who may also be interested. However, if you are forwarding this email, please delete the "unsubscribe" link at the bottom of this page. If you do not remove the "unsubscribe" option and a person who receives your forwarded email clicks "unsubscribe," it would result in **your name** being removed from our distribution list.



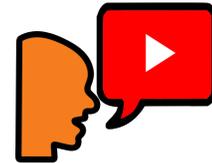
Twitter



Facebook



Instagram



Youtube

[https://www.arcnj.org/programs/njsap/self\\_advocacy.html](https://www.arcnj.org/programs/njsap/self_advocacy.html)



# New Jersey Self-Advocacy Program & New Jersey Statewide Self Advocacy Network

A program of The Arc of New Jersey since 1983

*Promoting Advocacy and Independence for People with  
Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*

New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project | 985 Livingston Avenue | North Brunswick, NJ 08902 US

[Unsubscribe](#) | [Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)



Try email marketing for free today!