



# Advocacy Matters

A digital newsletter produced by  
The New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project

## November 2025

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.](#)

## November Events

From November 12 to November 15 NJSAP Director, Erin Smithers, attended The Arc National Convention in Charlotte, NC. Erin spoke on a panel with Melanie Mills from The Arc of Arizona and Leigh Anne McKingsley from The Arc of US.



### **Silent No More: Supporting Victims with IDD to Speak Their Truth**

Violence and abuse among people with IDD continue to be a serious concern in the disability field. The lack of sex education informing people with IDD about what abuse is, barriers to reporting and limited community support too often keep victims alone in their trauma, without access to reporting hotlines or healing services. This session highlights recent findings from a federally-funded research project presented by a survivor with IDD, timely updates from Arizona's Sexual Violence and Disability Network and practical tips from The Arc of New Jersey's Self Advocacy Project about supporting survivors to speak their truth.

Additional Pictures from Convention:





Members of The Arc from New Jersey who attended the National Convention



Congratulations to Edwin Asuta from The Arc of Union County on winning the NCE 2025 Executive Excellence Award!

## Council Agenda Items

This month the councils worked on these items:

- The Council members were made aware of an Inclusive Community Advocacy Council opportunity by Supportive Housing Association of NJ (SHANJ). The council is looking for new members.
- The Council's also had the chance to participate in a new video campaign that was started by The Arc of NJ's Planning For Adult Life Program! **If you would like to participate you can find details below in our 'Get Involved' Section.**
- The Councils and the AB worked on a letter to Governor Healey in Massachusetts about the Judge Rotenberg Center in Canton, Massachusetts. This facility is still using electroshock on its students. The NJSSAN wrote letters about this back in 2018 to the FDA to oppose the use of this 'treatment' but the procedures continue and a letter writing campaign to the Governor has started. The Advisory Board has also decided to send this letter to National Disability Rights, and the Mass. Department of Human Rights and Services. You can see the letter below!



Click the image to download the letter!

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**New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project  
&  
Statewide Self-Advocacy Network**  
A program of The Arc of New Jersey since 1983

November 1, 2025

The Honorable Maura Healey  
Governor of Massachusetts

Dear Governor Healey,

We are a group of self-advocates with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (IDD) in New Jersey. We have been a part of The New Jersey Statewide Self-Advocacy Network for over 4 decades. We gather to help improve the life of people with disabilities in New Jersey but we have turned our focus to outside states when the need for it occurs. The need for it occurs today. On behalf of the 1,800 members of the New Jersey Statewide Self-Advocacy Network, we are writing to you to urge you to ban the use of electrical stimulation devices (ESDs) that are being used to treat self-injurious or aggressive behavior at The Judge Rotenberg Center (JRC) in Canton, Massachusetts.

The JRC is a facility that tries to control the actions of its students using aversives. The worst aversive the JRC uses is an electric shock device called a Graduated Electronic Decelerator (GED). The GED is attached to the student's body. Using a remote control, someone else can use the GED to give an electric shock to the person wearing it. The JRC has electrocuted people for: flapping their hands, standing up, swearing, not taking off a coat, noises or movements that they make because of their disability, or for screaming in pain while being shocked. The shocks are given in the form of 2 second electric shocks to various parts of the body through a remote control at the discretion of staff. Residents can wear up to 5 devices at a time 24 hours a day 7 days a week including while sleeping and showering.

Use of the GED on someone has all kinds of bad side effects. It can burn skin or make someone unable to move. It can make people so scared they sometimes are sent into mental health crisis. The JRC says that they need to use the GED on the people who live there because they struggle not to hurt themselves or others. But the JRC is the only place in the United States that uses electric shocks. All across America, people with the exact same disabilities as the people at the JRC get support that helps them with the exact same problems, without aversives.

We understand that we are a group of advocates from New Jersey but we can not stand by while others are being hurt and abused, even if not in our own state. We have written letters to



Supporting the rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities  
988 Livingston Avenue, North Brunswick, NJ 08902  
Phone: 732-743-8345 Fax: 732-749-8514  
E-mail: [NJSAP@arcnj.org](mailto:NJSAP@arcnj.org)  
[www.statewideadvocacyproject.org](http://www.statewideadvocacyproject.org)

## 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](#).



On November 11th, a training was provided to Kelsch Associates Inc. on 'Supported Decision Making'. There were 4 attendees present. This training goes over what it is, how to pick your supporters, how to communicate your needs, and examples.

On November 11th Erin Smithers presented a training to participants with The Arc of NJ's Family Institute program. The training was "Understanding Internet Safety". This training talks about how to stay safe online in general. Focusing on safely making payments, talking to people, and making sure you aren't getting scammed.

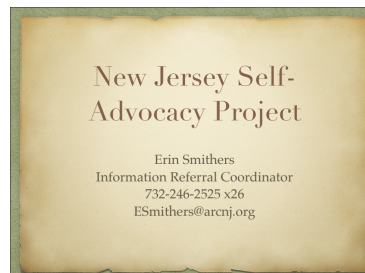


On November 18th, a training was provided to the Adult Transition Center at Sussex County Community College on 'Employment 101'. There were 8 attendees present. This training goes over the job search process, how to maintain a job, and activities.





On November 21st Erin presented a training to Employment Horizons in Cedar Knolls. 12 advocates attended this in-person training, all about the NJSAP and the NJSSAN. Information on how to join the New Jersey Statewide Self-Advocacy Network was included. Daily programming for NJSAP was also given out.



On November 26th, a training was provided to SCARC on 'How to Develop Testimony'. There were 150 attendees present. This training goes over how to write a testimony, how to prepare for a live session, and the process of attending a hearing.

## New Resources

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

### Tips to Prepare Testimony

*Testimony is a formal request for support. It is one of the most effective ways to advocate on legislative or policy issues.*

#### TIPS FOR WRITTEN TESTIMONY

- Use a letterhead if possible.
- Testimony should have the date at the top.
- Start your testimony with a polite greeting and an introduction of yourself.
- The next portion should contain what you want/need or what you are asking of the committee.
- Thank the committee for their time and consideration.
- End with a polite sign off. This should include your full name & your title.
- Your written testimony can be as long as you need but be mindful that the committee will be reading through many submissions.
- When you submit testimony, it is read and considered by the legislators even if you don't attend a hearing.



*Your voice matters! Written and/or verbal testimony is a way to advocate for your needs and wants in your state/county/town.*

#### TIPS FOR VERBAL TESTIMONY

- Verbal/oral testimony is limited to about 3 minutes.
- Prepare talking points ahead of time to address the important factors of your testimony.
- Talking points help ensure that your concerns are coming across and also that the hearing stays on track.
- Practice your talking points ahead of time so you are well-versed and comfortable on the day of the hearing.



Check out the NJ Legislature website for opportunities to testify!

<https://www.njleg.state.nj.us>



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



## Mindful Moment

Close your eyes

Take some slow  
breathes

Set an intention

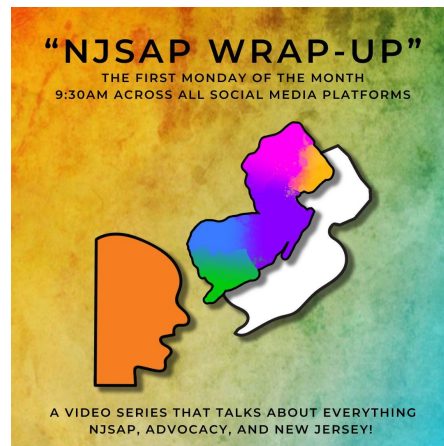


## Quick Tip:

Take a mindful moment before your first interaction. Close your eyes, take three slow breaths, and set an intention. It helps you stay grounded and reduces stress.

# NJSAP Wrap-Up

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



This month Erin Smithers walks you through how to navigate the NJSAP website. **Click on the image to visit the playlist and 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 November 21st Erin Smithers visited with Employment Horizons in Cedar Knolls to talk about NJSAP, The NJSSAN, and advocacy to their advocacy group.



# 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).



The Arc of NJ is looking for 14-21 year olds who would like to learn more about how to be an advocate in NJ! Join the NEW Youth Advisory Board Meetings by registering [here!](#)

**Join the WE CAN DO THAT! Challenge**

Want to show the world exactly what people with disabilities can do when entering adulthood?

We are launching a social media campaign with Community Alternatives Unlimited (CAU.org) with 5-10-second videos featuring teachers, parents, guardians, and especially individuals with developmental disabilities showing off their talents and showing what you can do!

Some examples include:

- "I can make myself lunch!"
- "I can create a sculpture with clay!"
- "I can go my college class!"

Send in your WE CAN DO THAT! to [helpdesk@planningforadulthoodlife.org](mailto:helpdesk@planningforadulthoodlife.org)

Participate in the "We Can Do That" Challenge. Send in a short video letting The Arc of NJ's Planning For Adult Life (PFAL) program know what you can do!  
Send your video to [helpdesk@PlanningForAdultLife.org](mailto:helpdesk@PlanningForAdultLife.org)

### Inclusive Community Advocacy Council (ICAC) Member Positions Available

Are you interested in empowering individuals with disabilities to obtain leadership roles?

Would you like to work toward increasing awareness and inclusion on non-profit boards?

Do you enjoy working on training development, outreach and advocacy?

If you responded yes to these questions, then you may be interested in applying for a position on the ICAC advisory council.

The Supportive Housing Association of New Jersey (SHA), in partnership with the [Support Center](#), is pleased to launch the Strengthening Inclusive Leadership Initiative (SILI) funded by the [Inclusive Healthy Communities \(IHC\)](#) grant program. The Inclusive Healthy Community (IHC) Grant Program is an initiative of the Division of Disability Services (DDS), New Jersey Department of Human Services (DHS).

Building on SHA's previous success with its IHC funded [Integrated Community Project \(ICP\)](#), the SILI will address the underrepresentation of individuals with disabilities on Advisory Boards and Boards of Directors (AB/BODs) of nonprofit and other corporations in New Jersey.

SILI is driven by the belief that individuals with disabilities—especially those further marginalized by race, age, socioeconomic status, immigration status, gender, or sexual orientation—bring invaluable lived experience to leadership spaces and decision-making tables.

The strategic approach involves establishing the Inclusive Community Advocacy Council (ICAC) to guide and support the initiative. Inclusive leadership training will be developed and delivered in partnership with the Support Center.

The initiative also aims to offer inclusive AB/BOD training for organizations, a matching process to connect trained participants with AB/BOD opportunities, and promote a culture shift toward inclusive leadership within organizations.

The strategy also includes facilitating the placement and onboarding of individuals with disabilities onto AB/BOD and providing ongoing support and mentorship to ensure long-term success and impact.

If interested in learning more about the role, [click on the following link for the member role description and information on how to apply](#). You can also email [denise.majka@shanj.org](mailto:denise.majka@shanj.org) directly with any questions.



The Supportive Housing Association of New Jersey (SHA) is pleased to launch the Strengthening Inclusive Leadership Initiative (SILI) funded by the Inclusive Healthy Communities (IHC) grant program. They are currently looking for members to join!  
**Click on the flyer above to download your copy!**

### Take part in these current action alerts!



**TAKE ACTION: No One Should Go Hungry!**



**ACT NOW: Cuts to Special Education Protections Are Happening NOW!**

## NJSSAN Calendars



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



## NJSSAN Council Meetings 2026

### -JANUARY-

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### -FEBRUARY-

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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

Join our newest Council Meeting held during the day! Starting January 2026!

# NEW NJSSAN MONTHLY MEETING

"STATEWIDE AM COUNCIL"

2<sup>ND</sup> WEDNESDAY OF THE  
MONTH

10AM ON ZOOM



STARTING  
JANUARY 14<sup>TH</sup>, 2026



## 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 5 Councils based on geographic location within the state.

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

### **NJ Statewide Self-Advocacy Network Position Statements**

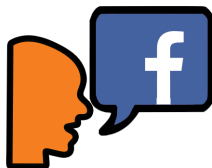
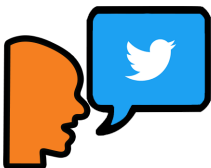
The New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project (NJSSAP) is a program of The Arc of New Jersey established in 1983 to challenge individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to become involved in events, legislative policies, and issues that affect their lives or lives of others with disabilities.

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](#)

NJSSAN Position Statements  
www.njssanproject.org 712-749-8514

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[Youtube](#)

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



# New Jersey Self-Advocacy Project & 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

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