



Advocacy Matters

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

July 2026

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HAPPY
**DISABILITY
PRIDE
MONTH**



July is Disability Pride month and the anniversary of the signing of the
American's with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Signed into law on July 26, 1990, The ADA, or Americans With Disabilities Act, is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in all areas of public life, including employment, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public.

Many people with disabilities still face barriers to being fully included and valued. Ableism is often ignored, but its effects are real. It limits access to education, jobs, healthcare, and respect.

Disability Pride Month challenges that. At its core, Disability Pride is about being accepted on our own terms. It means disability isn't something to hide or fix. It's part of who we are. Everyone deserves inclusion, rights, and respect, without having to earn them.

Disability Pride Month also reinforces a basic principle: people with disabilities belong in the decisions that shape school, work, health care, and community life.





STATE OF NEW JERSEY
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

Proclamation

WHEREAS, it is estimated that approximately 29% of the United States' population has some type of disability; and

WHEREAS, people with disabilities are vital members of their communities and residents of our Great State; and

WHEREAS, through the advocacy work of people with disabilities, all residents gain greater understanding and acceptance of disabled peoples' capabilities and contributions to the Garden State; and

WHEREAS, the New Jersey Department of Human Services is the home of the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, the Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Division of Developmental Disabilities and the Division of Disability Services, all of which serve as gateways to New Jersey's resources for people with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, Disability Pride encourages individuals to join together in an effort to gain greater public understanding that having a disability is only one part of the many attributes of an individual and does not diminish an individual or lessen what an individual is capable of accomplishing; and

WHEREAS, Disability Pride promotes the independence, inclusion, and wellbeing of residents with disabilities across New Jersey;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Mikie Sherrill, Governor of the State of New Jersey, do hereby proclaim:

JULY 2026
AS
DISABILITY PRIDE MONTH

in New Jersey.



GIVEN, under my hand and the Great Seal of the State of New Jersey, this twenty-ninth day of June in the year two thousand twenty-six, the two hundred fiftieth year of the Independence of the United States.

Dale G. Callahan

Lt. GOVERNOR

Mikie Sherrill

GOVERNOR

Disability Pride is a time for celebrating the moments that pushed equal rights for all people with disabilities.

While we celebrate Disability Pride Month in July, and celebrate the signing of the ADA, there were many events that helped form disability rights with activism and advocacy. These are just a few of the amazing people and events that helped form inclusion and equality.

Disability Pride

March 12, 1990-
Over 60 activists
crawled up 83 steps of
the US Capitol.

1977 504 Sit-In -
Over 150 activists
occupied the
Department of Health,
Education, and
Welfare building to
enforce Section 504 of
the Rehabilitation Act.

Ed Roberts -
Fought institutional
barriers and was the
first student in a
wheelchair to attend
the University of
Berkeley.

Judy Heumann-
Sued the New York
Board of Ed for the
right to teach.
Traveled the world
promoting disability
rights.



#THANKS TO THE ADA

"The ADA is good to me! It helps me vote!"

-Cornus, Council 2 Member

@newjerseySAP / @NJSAP
@thearcofnj

#DisabilityPride

July is Disability Pride Month and the anniversary of
The Americans with Disabilities Act.

What makes you proud to be a self-advocate?

I'm proud to be a self-advocate because I
speak up for the rights we deserve in this
world.

-Clint, Independent Advocate of Council 1

Facebook and Instagram: @newjerseySAP
BlueSky, X, Youtube: @njsap
www.njselfadvocacyproject.org

#THANKS TO THE ADA

@newjerseySAP / @NJSAP
@thearcofnj

Disability Pride and the ADA

Celebrate The Americans with Disabilities Act and Disability Pride Month by reading more quotes
from self-advocates.

[Read More](#)

July Events

On July 24th NJSAP set up a table at Pier Village in Long Branch to disseminate information and resources about the anniversary of the signing of the ADA and Disability Pride Month! Advocates came from all over New Jersey to volunteer their time to talk about Disability Pride Month and the ADA!



Council Agenda Items

This month our Council's worked on these items:

- [Nominations for the NJSSAN Conference Awards just opened.](#) Councils worked on their nominations.
- NJSSAN members also filled out templates for ADA and Disability Pride Month. You can see their templates on our social media or on our [website!](#)
- The Advisory Board worked on finalizing details for the Fall Conference! [Registration is now open!!](#)

Advocacy In Action



"Never give up! I am an Eagle Scout and I volunteer at the Long Branch Free Public Library."
Yusef Q., NJSSAN Member

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 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!

FREE TRAININGS

FOR ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES

TRAINING TOPICS

- SELF-ADVOCACY TRAININGS
- LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY TRAININGS
- EMPLOYMENT TRAININGS
- TECHNOLOGY TRAININGS
- COMMUNICATION/RELATIONSHIPS TRAININGS
- HEALTHY LIVING TRAININGS
- GUIDED ACTIVITIES
- AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA)



REQUEST A TRAINING FOR YOUR GROUP HERE:

[HTTPS://WWW.ARCNJ.ORG/PROGRAMS/NJSAP/TRAININGS.HTML](https://www.arcnj.org/programs/njsap/trainings.html)

New Resources

This new resource is available on [our website](#), or you can click on it to download it directly to your computer!

Looking to get a job? There are some ways you can advocate for yourself before you get a job to make sure that you are being heard!

PRE-EMPLOYMENT ADVOCACY TIPS

Discuss all goals during your IEP/ISP. Keep a list during the year!



Discuss the reasons why you want a specific job.



Keep a folder of all your important documents.



Know your rights with the ADA!!



Participate in the process.



Ask for support when you need it!



REMEMBER: YOU ARE THE MOST
IMPORTANT PERSON IN THIS PROCESS!
THIS IS ALL ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT!



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

BE PREPARED

LIST

- **MEDICATIONS**
- **ALLERGIES**
- **EMERGENCY CONTACT**



Quick Tip:

Keep a list of your medications, allergies, and emergency contacts on your phone. Being prepared can make a big difference in an emergency.

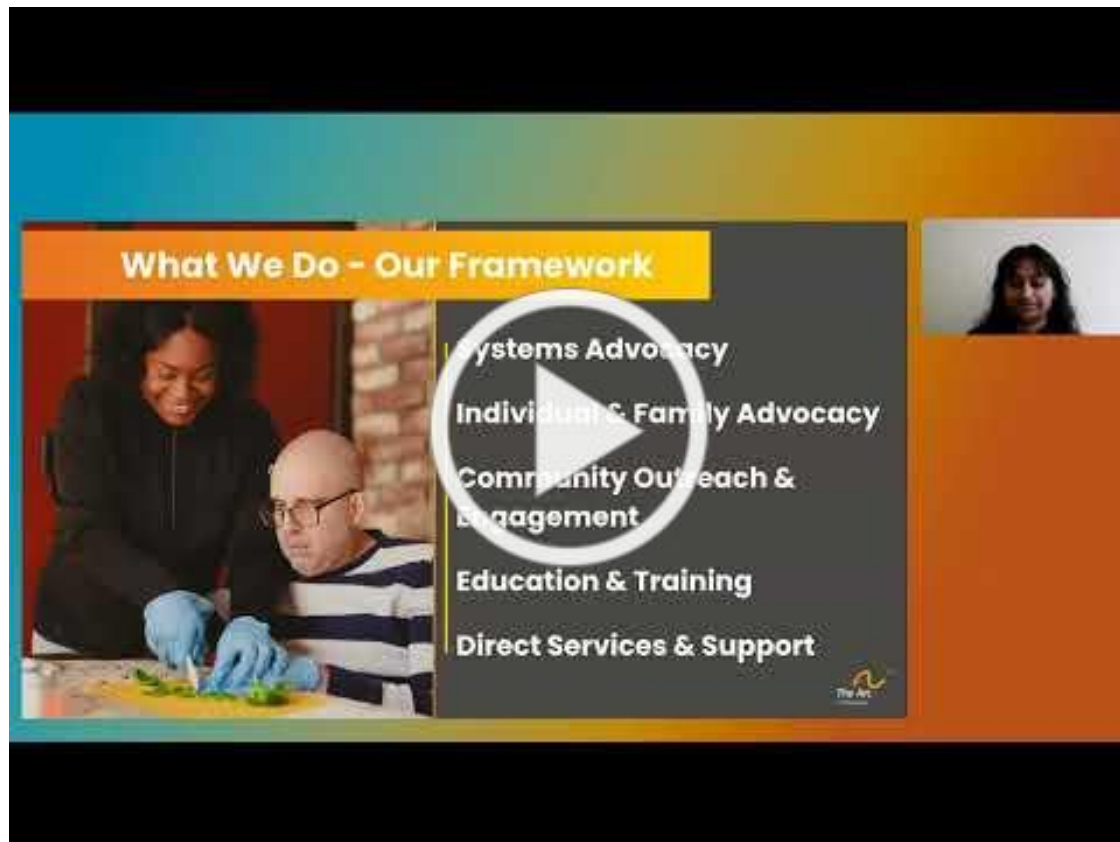
Having all of your information together and readily available helps you advocate for yourself when you are at the doctors, as well as in emergencies.

NJSAP Webinars

NJSAP webinars are for adults and students with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities, their family members, and Direct Support Professionals.

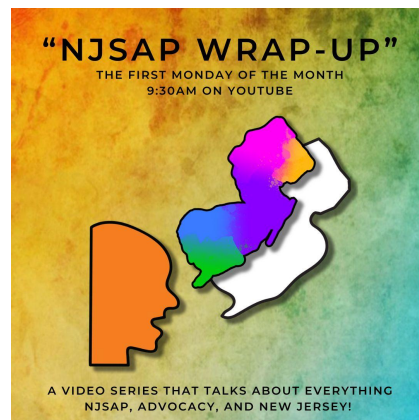
We present hour-long trainings every Tuesday at 2 PM on a variety of topics relating to self-advocacy and healthy living, available to view right from your home, office, classroom or wherever you may be!

View our latest advocacy webinar below: Programs with The Arc and Navigating System Agencies, presented by Reana Panday, Communications Coordinator at The Arc of New Jersey.



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 Trailblazers and our weekly hikes.
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



WANT TO START AN ADVOCACY GROUP?

NJSAP can provide free trainings to help you start, and maintain, a successful advocacy group for people with IDD.



Visit our website to sign up for your free trainings!
<https://www.arcnj.org/programs/njsap/trainings.html>

Upcoming NJSAP Events

Governmental Affairs Ambassador Program ★★

On Zoom ➡ 11 AM - 12 PM

August 7th November 6th

This is a quarterly meeting intended to help individuals with IDD get more involved in legislative advocacy!

Join Erin Smithers and Michael Pearson Jr. to learn about current bills going through the NJ legislature. Each meeting will end with an advocacy activity or training.

Join The Meeting Here:
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89555668345>

The Arc of New Jersey



Join us for our **new** Governmental Affairs Ambassador Program!

These are quarterly meetings for advocates. We will discuss current bills going through the NJ legislature. There will also be an advocacy training or activity during each meeting.

No need to register, just join us on August 7th at 11am!

NJSSAN Fall Conference

**Registration is
NOW OPEN!**

**Register
Here!**



Nominations are open for the Conference Awards!

[Fill out the nomination form here!](#)

[Sponsorship and Exhibitor options are now available!](#)

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.



It is essential to understand how disabled people are able to access the polls in local, state, and federal elections. This tool will help your organization analyze and prioritize voting policies that improve voting access, particularly for disabled voters.

This toolkit is divided into four main sections—voter registration, voting information, voting in-person, and voting by mail—with a mix of yes/no and open-ended questions for your organization to consider.

[Fill out the survey here!!](#)



The Administration for Community Living (ACL) wants to hear from you. ACL is asking people to complete a short survey about Protection and Advocacy (P&A) organizations. Whether you have used P&A services or are simply familiar with them, your feedback is important. Your responses will help ACL better understand public awareness of P&A organizations and identify ways to improve access to services, increase awareness, and strengthen the P&A network.

The survey is voluntary and takes about 15–20 minutes to complete. Your responses will be combined with others and will not be linked to you personally.

Feedback due by Friday, August 7, 2026.

[Fill out the Survey here!](#)

Take part in these current action alerts!



[Tell Congress: Protect Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services](#)



[Defend IDEA: Keep Special Education Where It Belongs](#)

**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

2026 Calendar

Click on the image to download
the calendar

-JANUARY-	-FEBRUARY-	-MARCH-
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-OCTOBER-	-NOVEMBER-	-DECEMBER-
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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.

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.

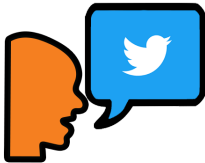
1. [Home & Community-Based Services \(HCBS\)](#)
2. [Housing for People with IDD](#)
3. [Transportation](#)
4. [Supported Decision Making and Alternatives to Guardianship](#)
5. [Raising Awareness of IDD Issues](#)

NJSAP@ArcNJ.org

NJSSAN POSITION STATEMENTS
www.njsap@arcnj.org

732-749-8314

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[Youtube](#)

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 Program | 985 Livingston Avenue | North Brunswick, NJ 08902 US

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