



2020

ANNUAL REPORT

Disability Rights Nebraska

Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities



Our Mission

Disability Rights Nebraska uses a combination of legal advocacy, public policy advocacy, citizen advocacy, self-advocacy and advocacy education to protect vulnerable people with disabilities, especially those who earn, live or work in isolated, segregated or congregated settings

Our Vision

Nebraskans with disabilities, especially those who are the most vulnerable, will be free from harm and able to exercise the same rights, opportunities and choices available to all citizens in order to live fully integrated and culturally valued lives.

A Strategic Approach

During the 2020 fiscal year, Disability Rights Nebraska's work was guided by three major priorities outlined in our 5-year Strategic Plan.

01

Ensuring People with Disabilities are **FREE FROM HARM**

We protect and advocate for vulnerable people with disabilities, especially those living in segregated, isolated and congregated facilities, to ensure they are free from death, abuse, neglect, and violations of their rights.

People with disabilities have human & legal rights that protect their health, safety, personal integrity & self-determination.

Advocating for people with disabilities to live, work, & learn in the **MOST INCLUSIVE SETTINGS**

02

People with disabilities deserve opportunities to be fully included in communities of their choice.

We promote the community inclusion of people with disabilities by advocating for 1) non-segregated, non-isolated, person-centered services and supports, 2) opportunities for people to have culturally valued social roles, and 3) meaningful choices based on a person's interests, desires and wishes.

03

Engaging People with Disabilities in **SELF-ADVOCACY**

We believe in the philosophy of "nothing about us without us" and will stand with people who have disabilities to achieve their hopes, dreams, and things not yet imagined based on a person's interests, desires and wishes.

People with disabilities are the experts when it comes to their lives.

People Served by the numbers

607

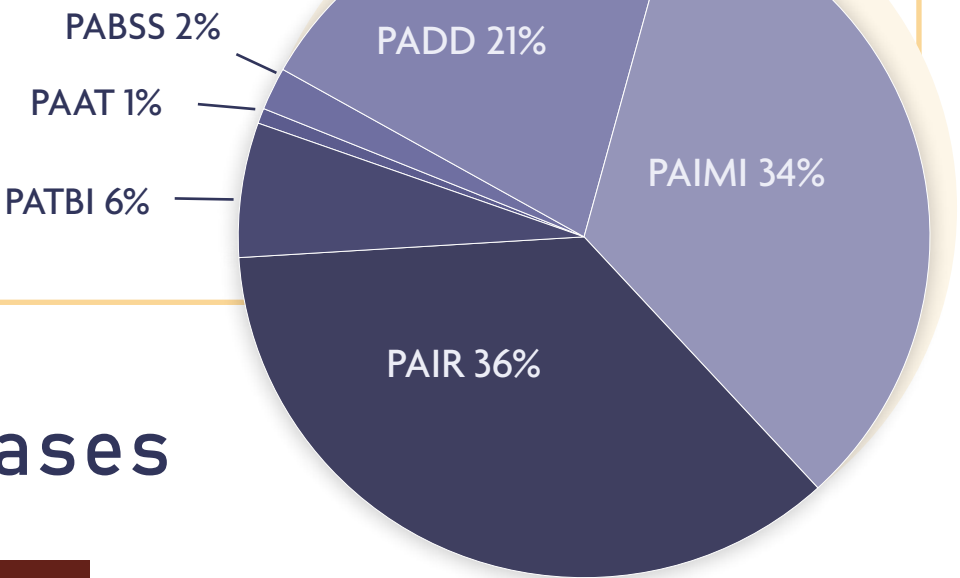
Total
People
Served

* a person may have more than one service request

689

total service requests

Service requests include instances during which our staff provided information and referrals or case services, including individual advocacy and investigations.



68

total cases

Social
Security

12

rights
violations

19

abuse/
neglect/
exploitation

35

0 10 20 30 40

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

PAIMI: Protection & Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness

PAAT: Protection & Advocacy for Assistive Technology

PAVA: Protection & Advocacy for Voting Access

PATBI: Protection & Advocacy for Persons with Traumatic Brain Injury

PADD: Protection & Advocacy for Persons with Developmental Disabilities

U.S. Social Security Administration

PABSS: Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security

PABRP: Representative Payees of Social Security

U.S. Department of Education

PAIR: Protection and Advocacy for Individual Rights

State of Nebraska

Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health

Supported Decision Making

as an alternative to guardianship

Disability Rights Nebraska is committed to ensuring individuals with disabilities have the final say in the decisions that affect their lives. In FY 2020, our Public Policy Team laid groundwork for systemic progress toward supported decision-making as an alternative to guardianship.

Throughout the year, we educated hundreds of Nebraskans via presentations on support decision-making, which focused on the individual with the disability as the center of the decision-making process. Presentations to the Nebraska Supreme Court Commission on Guardianships and Conservatorships and the State Unit on Aging's Elder Justice Training were offered. Attendees at the presentations included policymakers, providers, and stakeholders.

Supported decision making occurs when "people use trusted friends, family members, and professionals to help them understand the situations and choices they face, so they may make their own decisions"

Developmental Disabilities Waiting List Initiative

"Waiting for Services" Key Takeaways

Since 2018, 2300 people sat on the state waiting list not receiving services.

Of those on the waiting list, about 75% are between the ages of 10 and 30.

The typical person pulled off the waiting list in 2017 or 2018 waited for 6 to 7 years.

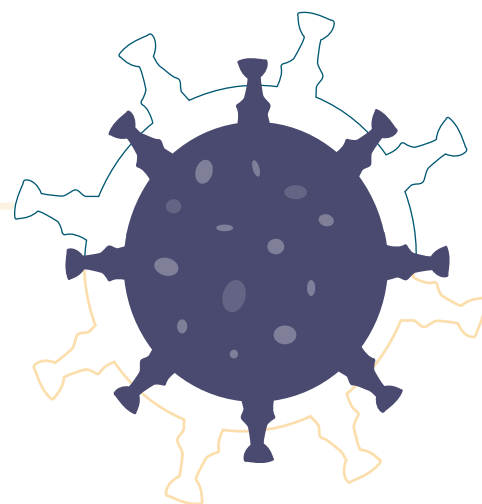
Nebraska uses fewer of its resources on developmental disability services compared to other states.

Nebraskans with developmental disabilities are entitled to services from the state. However, not all Nebraskans are provided these services in their time of need.

We worked with other advocacy organizations to analyze the scope of the waiting list problem. The result was the report, "Waiting for Services: Analyzing the Impact of Nebraska's Developmental Disabilities Waiting List" published in November 2019.

After the report's release Chief Executive Officer, Eric Evans, presented the report's findings before the Nebraska Legislature and outlined recommendations for addressing the waiting list.

Disability Advocacy during COVID-19



In 2020, the COVID-19 virus incited an unprecedented pandemic, resulting in widespread uncertainty.

When the world slowed in 2020, disability advocates in Nebraska pushed forward.

In March, our physical offices closed, and staff began working remotely. While Disability Rights Nebraska adapted to new operating procedures, we simultaneously continued to serve individuals with disabilities and began addressing systemic issues stemming from COVID-19.

SECURING COVID-19 PROTECTIONS IN CONGREGATED LIVING FACILITIES

Because of the pandemic, we temporarily halted in-person visits to congregated living facilities. Quickly, staff implemented a virtual monitoring plan. We surveyed nearly 100 facilities on topics related to facilities' current conditions and COVID-19. Results prompted us to bring concerns to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

Our advocacy led to several reforms, including

- improvements to information dissemination to congregate facilities to ensure accurate, timely data;
- renewal of DHHS inspections of long-term care facilities
- expansion of testing in long-term care facilities; and
- an overhaul to the [state portal](#) for facilities requesting protective personal equipment (PPE)



ADVOCATING AGAINST DISCRIMINATORY CARE RATIONING

As hospitals neared capacity, Disability Rights Nebraska became concerned that, if the state did not issue proper ethical and legal guidance, people with disabilities seeking medical treatment would be illegally discriminated against.

We wrote a letter to Nebraska state officials, urging the State take steps to ensure life-saving care would not be illegally withheld from people with disabilities.

When we did not receive a timely response, we called upon other advocacy organizations to publicly support our position on care rationing. Fifteen stakeholder organizations joined us by signing onto a second letter to state officials, publicly calling for guidelines ensuring scarce resources would be provided in compliance with civil rights laws.

As result of our efforts, the state affirmed that, in the event of rationing of ventilators or medications, there would be a non-discrimination policy in place mirroring guidance from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Civil Rights (OCR).

CALLING FOR TEST NEBRASKA ACCESSIBILITY

Throughout COVID-19, TestNebraska remained inaccessible to people who couldn't take the online screening test or find transportation to a testing site. As a result, many people with disabilities, especially those living in facilities, were unable to get tested for COVID-19 through the program. We responded to this violation of federal anti-discrimination laws by filing a complaint with the U.S. Department of Health and Service's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Legislative Session Highlights

A BILL THAT WOULD GREENLIGHT RESTRAINT IN NEBRASKA SCHOOLS FAILED.

The purpose of LB 147 was to “authorize teachers and other school personnel to ‘use reasonable physical intervention’ to protect the student, other individuals, or school property.” Because this bill would disproportionately affect students with disabilities, we prioritized educating policymakers and the public on our concerns about LB 147 during the 106th Legislative Session. In July 2020, a motion to invoke cloture failed on a vote of 32-15.

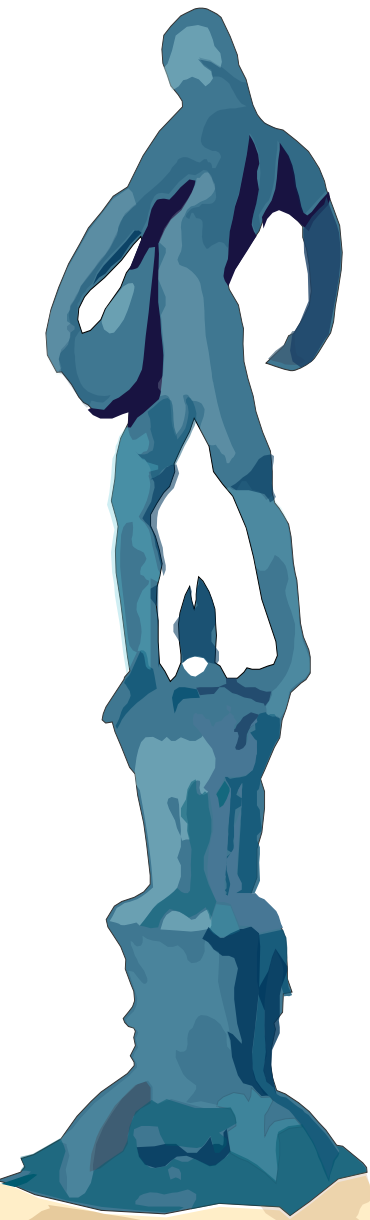
FROM OUR LB 147 TESTIMONY

LB 147 is at best largely unnecessary, codifying authorities that teachers and administrators already have, and at worst a policy which could result in more student and staff injuries...



REFORMS TO “MEDICAID BUY-IN” PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

LB 323’s purpose was to “change eligibility provisions under the Medical Assistance Act for certain people with disabilities” For years, we have been working to reform eligibility for the Medicaid Insurance for Workers with Disabilities program. In FY 2020, this goal finally became realized when LB 323, a bill that our agency was instrumental in developing, passed unanimously in the Nebraska Legislature. The program, also known as the “Medicaid Buy-in,” allows people with disabilities to earn up to 250% of federal poverty without losing Medicaid coverage because they have surpassed the income eligibility limit.



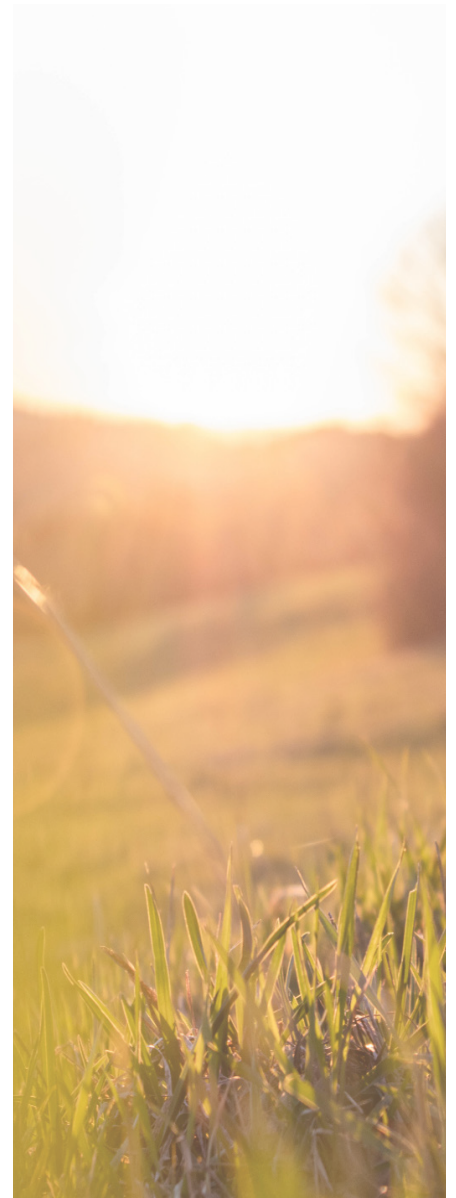
Citizen Advocacy

We continued to provide technical assistance and support to Nebraska's five Citizen Advocacy offices.

Citizen advocates make a commitment to representing their partner's rights and interests as if they were their own. They may assume one or more advocacy roles, some of which may last for life.

In one instance, we were fortunate enough to document a successful Citizen Advocacy relationship between two artists.

The advocate, who is an established artist in his community, was matched with a woman with autism who has a passion for drawing. The advocate brought the protégé into his art community, introducing her to several like-minded friends and providing her with opportunities to exhibit and sell her work. Through this relationship, this woman has become an active part of a community of peers that admire and celebrate her talents.



Inclusive Education Lay Advocacy

In 2019, Disability Rights Nebraska launched the Inclusive Education Lay Advocacy Project to provide advocates with the tools necessary to help secure inclusive education for students with disabilities.



The first cohort of nine Inclusive Education Lay Advocates completed training during the first month of FY2020, after receiving 35 hours of training from experienced professionals.

In July 2020, another nine individuals participated in and completed a training session. By the end of FY 2020, Disability Rights Nebraska's Inclusive Education Lay Advocacy Project had fully trained 17 advocates to assist families of students with disabilities, and 11 students and their families were assisted by trained lay advocates.

Outreach & Media

COVID-19 limited our ability to raise awareness in face-to-face settings, but that didn't keep us from getting information out to Nebraskans in FY2020.

2157

followers

on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube

5904

publications distributed

to provide information about our agency and programs

2238

individuals educated

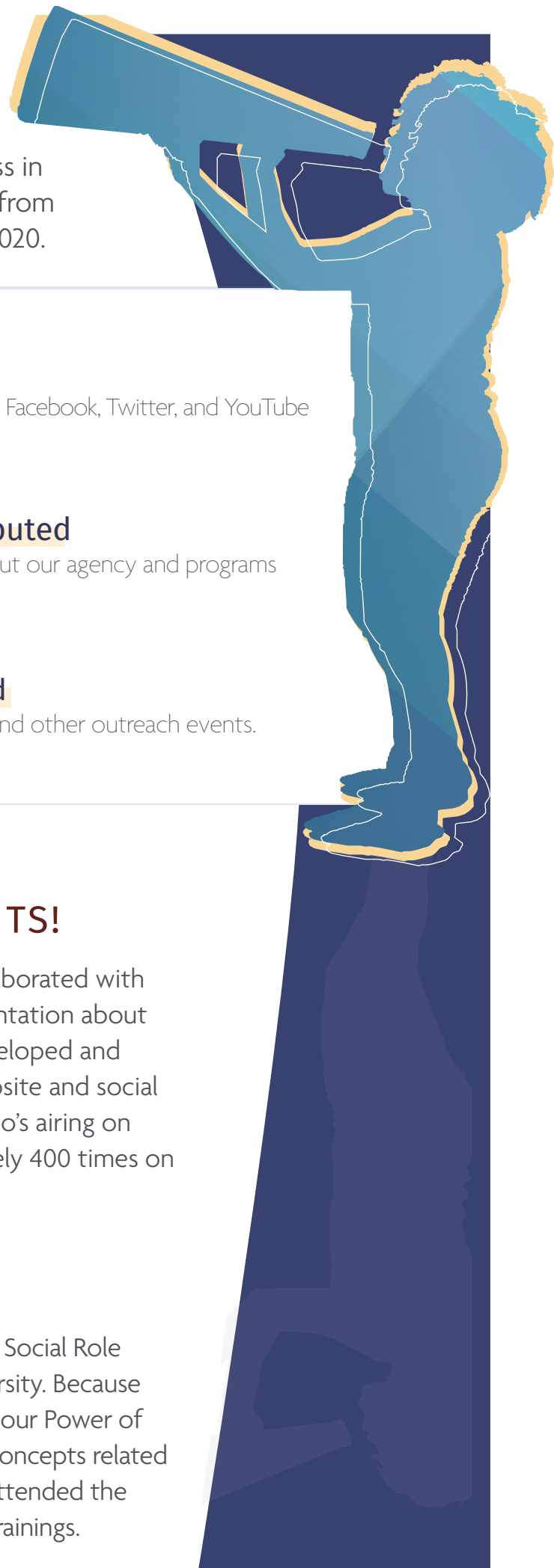
at presentations, trainings, and other outreach events.

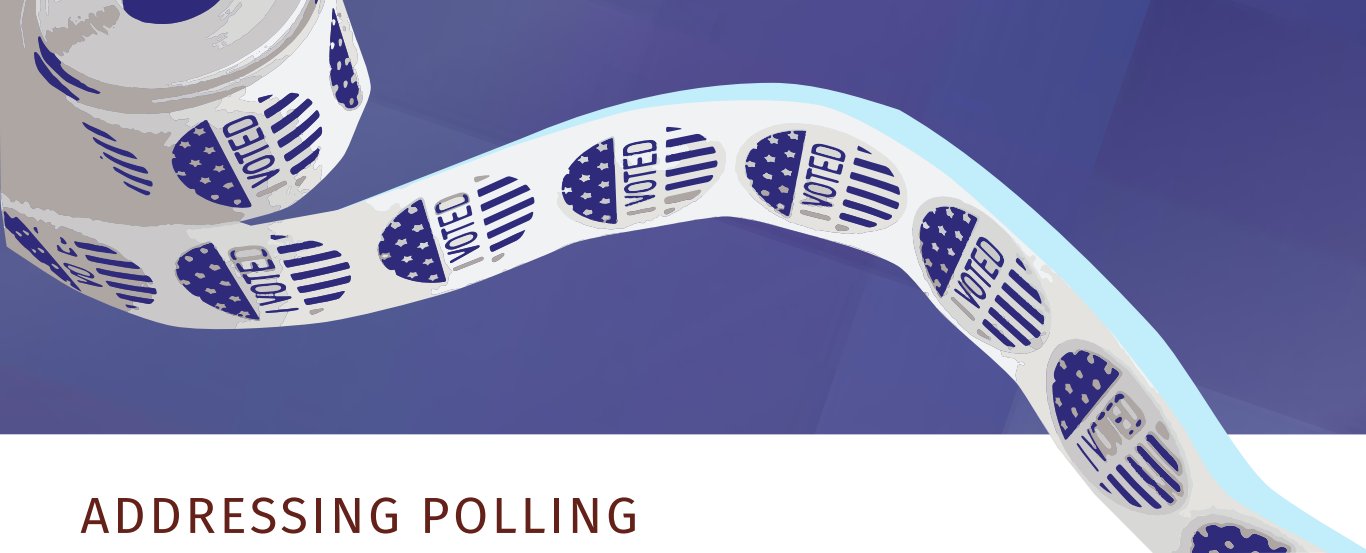
EVICTIION, DISABILITY, AND COVID-19: KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!

In Summer 2020, Disability Rights Nebraska collaborated with other organizations to livestream a panel presentation about COVID-19, housing, and evictions. Staff also developed and disseminated related resources through our website and social media. Thirty-seven people tuned into the video's airing on Facebook Live and it's been viewed approximately 400 times on LNKTV's YouTube Channel.

POWER OF ROLES

Annually, Disability Rights Nebraska hosts a 3-day Social Role Valorization training at Nebraska Wesleyan University. Because of COVID-19, though, we opted to hold a free 1-hour Power of Roles webinar to introduce a larger audience to concepts related to Social Role Valorization. A total of 111 people attended the webinar, and several indicated interest in future trainings.





ADDRESSING POLLING PLACE INACCESSIBILITY

For over a decade, Disability Rights Nebraska staff and volunteers have visited polling places and completed surveys to identify accessibility issues. This year, the data proved its value in our efforts to inform the Secretary of State's office and election officials about accessibility concerns in polling places.

In Fall 2020, we distributed letters to all county election officials to help educate them on data and resources for addressing polling place accessibility. We also presented this information to the Nebraska Secretary of State's office, and they pledged to continue educating county election officials with our concerns in mind. Further, they agreed to allow us to review the training materials offered to counties.

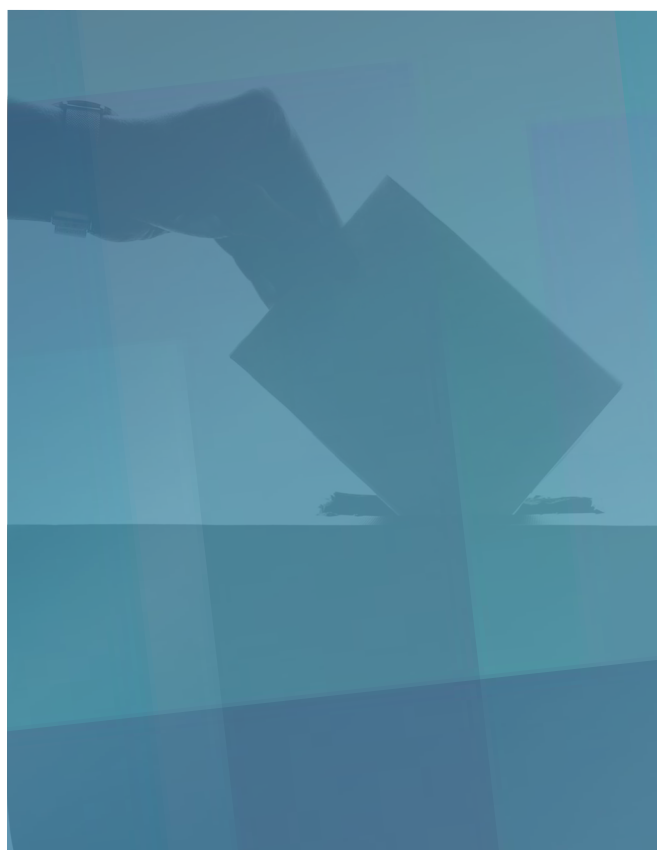
These first steps mark the beginning of our partnership with State officials to address voting-related accessibility matters in the future.

EDUCATING VOTERS

In the months preceding the 2020 Presidential Election, we focused our voting education efforts on collaborations with other advocacy organizations, virtual outreach, and dissemination of online resources.

We held several webinars educating people with disabilities about voting rights, including two Facebook Live events with The Arc of Nebraska and Civic Nebraska. These videos, which were viewed by about 1300 people, answered questions about how voters with disabilities can safely register and vote during the pandemic.

We also distributed informational materials about voting throughout the year, overhauled our "You Can Vote" webpage, and developed an FAQ with voting-related questions that people with disabilities commonly encounter.



Financials

TOTAL SUPPORT & REVENUE

\$1,911,311

Federal Government \$1,396,086

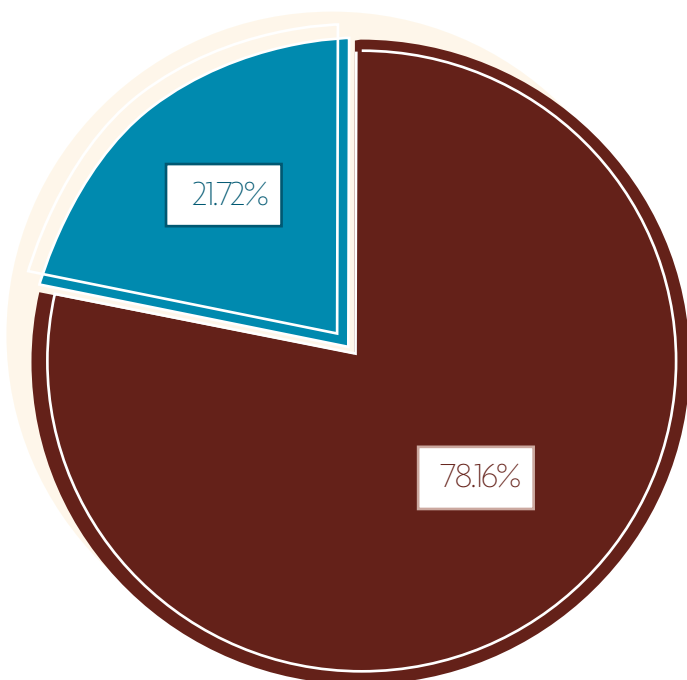
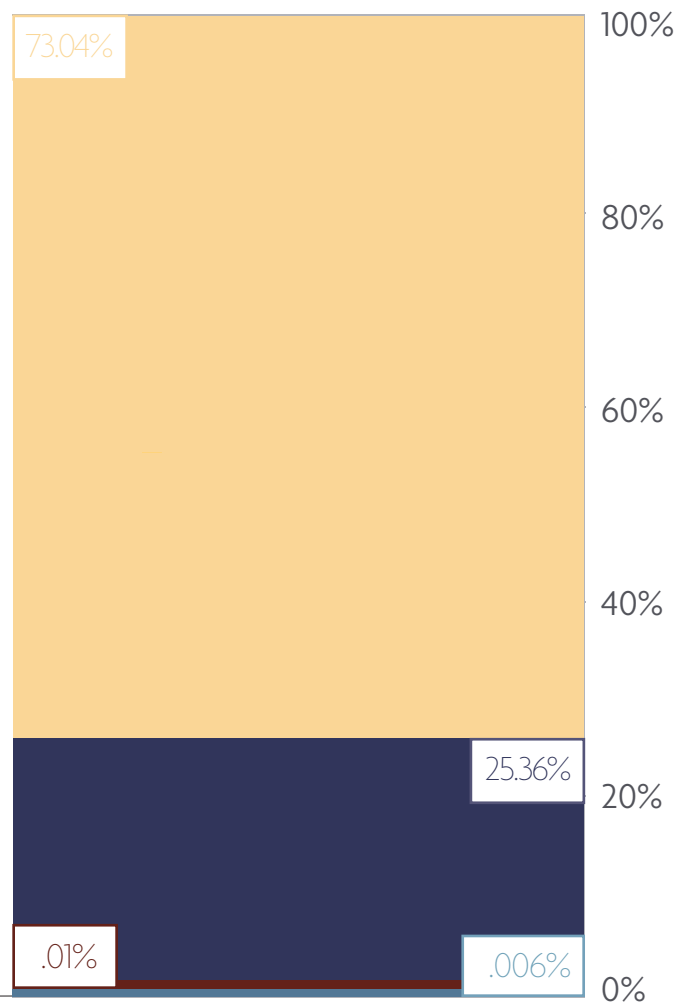
US Dept. of Health & Human Services \$1,074,776
US Dept. of Education \$144,364
US Social Security Administration \$176,946

NE Dept of Health & Human Services \$484,750

Local Grants \$19,568

Developmental Disabilities Council: \$5,294
Community Engagement Table: \$4,960
Munroe-Meyer Institute: \$1,814
University of NE Medical Center: \$7,500

Donations, Interest, & Other Income \$10,908



TOTAL EXPENSES

\$1,904,477

Administrative Expenses \$413,793

Fundraising: \$43,467
Management & Administration: \$370,362

Program Expenses \$1,488,684

Salaries & Benefits: \$978,389
Operating Expenses: \$140,552
Travel Expenses: \$7,644
Educational Expenses: \$20,848
Contractual Services: \$13,782
Citizen Advocacy Support: \$327,469

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Case Advocate

Yorleny Diaz-Sullivan
Intake Specialist

Kitra Monnier
Law Clerk

Alternative Formats

Disability Rights Nebraska's 2020 Annual Report is available in alternative formats, including a printable PDF version and a Rich Text Format version (accessible Word document).

Visit our [website](#) or contact us by phone or email to request an alternative version of the report.

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